the weekly Standard

DECEMBER 24, 2001 / $3.95

PSYCHING OUT THE TALIBAN
MATT LABASH

The New Civility

BARNES on Daschle's partisanship

HAYES on Bush's blocked nominees

TELL on the runaway Civil Rights Commission

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Each year, the Student Conservation Association creates opportunities for more than 2,500 high school and college students to volunteer in parks, forests, wildlife refuges and urban areas across the United States. Dedicated to building the next generation of conservation leaders and inspiring lifelong stewardship of the environment and communities, the association operates from a national headquarters in Charlestown, New Hampshire, and five regional offices.

The SCA is one of a growing number of nonprofit organizations that are taking advantage of technology to help them create a solid infrastructure and manage operations efficiently. In the case of the SCA, directing several thousand volunteers and supervising projects in all 50 states requires the effective use of relational databases, collaborative communications software and productivity applications.

Improving operations is just one of several ways in which technology is enabling nonprofits to do more with their resources. They are also using technology and the Internet to provide a greater level of support for volunteers, and to offer more comprehensive services to constituents.

The Points of Light Foundation of Washington, D.C., works through a national network of nearly 500 Volunteer Centers to connect more than 1 million people with volunteer service opportunities to help solve serious social problems. The foundation's Volunteer Center National Network also helps build the capacity of over 64,000 organizations to effectively mobilize volunteers to meet local needs. Participating volunteer centers use customized databases to facilitate involvement, coordination, and the measurement of community impact. By doing so, they are able to quickly and efficiently match potential volunteers with opportunities that suit their interests.

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The Fund for the City of New York, whose mission is to improve the quality of life for all New Yorkers, is a leader in developing technology systems that help nonprofits and government agencies streamline operations, improve performance and expand services. For instance, the Fund has developed the Domestic Violence Court System, an Internet-based software program that guides a victim through the first phase of the protective order process. The system directs the user—advocate, victim or shelter staff worker—through a series of questions, which are then reconfigured into standard legal forms that can be filed with the appropriate courts.

Microsoft believes that people can do amazing things if they have the tools and resources. We are committed to working in partnership with community organizations, the public sector and other technology companies to find sustainable solutions that make real and lasting differences in people's lives. In light of the events of September 11, and as the nation deals with an economy in recession, nonprofits are playing a more significant role than ever in serving the needs of communities and the nation.

When used appropriately, technology can help expand the reach and deepen the impact of community organizations—whether it is helping to educate our young people, inspiring them to provide stewardship of our natural resources, or supporting victims of domestic violence in their quest for a new life.

One in a series of essays on technology and society. More information is available at microsoft.com/issues.

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Bin Laden's Weak Horse

The new bin Laden video has been so thoroughly chewed over by the commentariat that THE SCRAPBOOK has only a couple of points to make. First, the tape was much more effective at strengthening the convictions of those who had already grasped bin Laden's depravity than at changing the minds of the deluded. This is unsurprising. If you are inclined to believe that the Mossad engineered the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, then you will find it easy to believe that the Mossad can create propaganda videos starring an Osama bin Laden look-alike. A number of people on this planet, after all, still believe the Apollo moon landings were filmed in Hollywood.

Nonetheless—or, rather, for this very reason—the release of the tape was a huge success for the U.S. government. It forced an exquisitely tortuous choice on the bin Laden sympathizers and America haters. They had to declare their party loyalty: sane or demented. Mohamed Atta's father in Egypt said, "It's a forgery, of course." Sufficient reason, if one were needed, to stop listening to his ravings. Perhaps more surprising, especially to its American fan club, was the decision by Qatar-based satellite TV channel Al Jazeera to go with a report from "researcher" Hani Subai in London, declaring the video to have been "fabricated. . . . It is shameful that the strongest nation in the world should be presenting this tape as proof." Something to bear in mind the next time you hear someone extolling the virtues of Al Jazeera.

Second, even as the tape showed the limits of "evidence" in changing the hearts and minds of the delusional, bin Laden himself seemed to confirm that the best American PR comes not from Madison Avenue but from the Pentagon. When people see a "strong horse and a weak horse," said bin Laden, "by nature they will like the strong horse."

Or, as Reuel Marc Gerecht put it in a prescient piece for this magazine ("Liberate Iraq," May 14, 2001):

> Unfortunately, the Arab Middle East easily takes solace in a ruthless despot who can intimidate America. . . . The State Department's Near East Bureau and the Office of Policy Planning . . . do Secretary Powell a disservice when they generate analyses of the Middle East depicting the United States forever on the seesaw of the Arab street. . . . The United States must not try to win a popularity contest in the Arab world—the very act of doing so will make us appear weak. . . . If we are to protect ourselves and our friends in the Middle East, who are many, we have to rebuild the awe which we have lost through nearly a decade of retreat.

We don't need any more bin Laden tapes. The American horse is getting stronger every day. ♦

Saddam Hussein's American Apologist

Scott Ritter's descent from U.N. arms inspector to apologist for Saddam Hussein was ably chronicled in these pages several weeks back by Stephen F. Hayes. Last week Ritter added to this shameful record, arguing that the Iraqi dictator would be justified in working with an Osama bin Laden operative to blow up a Radio Free Europe facility in the Czech Republic for broadcasting news Saddam disapproves of.

At a Dec. 7 briefing for the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine in Washington, D.C., Ritter addressed the subject of meetings between an Iraqi spy and Mohamed Atta in Prague: "What it appears transpired was that the Iraqi intelligence officer . . . spoke with Mohamed Atta at length about an attack, but it was an attack on a radio transmission tower of Radio Free Europe in Prague, Czechoslovakia. . . . If you're the Iraqi government and you're looking at the Iraqi National Congress, they are a legitimate enemy. Indeed," Ritter added, "you could make the case that the Radio Free Europe transmission tower, under international law, is a legitimate target."

Actually, as far as we can determine, even Iraqi intelligence doesn't seem to think destroying a Radio Free Europe transmitter is a "legitimate" thing to be doing. Does anyone besides Scott Ritter think international law would countenance such an outrage? Does Jack Kemp, who as recently as his Dec. 6 syndicated column was still citing Ritter as a disinterested, authoritative expert on Iraq? ♦

Creeping Gannettization

Another milestone to be noted in the Gannettization of a fine, formerly conservative editorial page: The *Detroit News* did an about-face last week and threw out principle for P.C. pragmatism on the subject of racial preferences at public universities. For years, under editorial page editor Tom Bray, the *News* had published legally informed, coherent arguments for colorblind admissions to the University of Michigan. Now, hewing to the diversity dogma of publisher Mark Silverman and the Gannett Corp., it announces feebly, "Affirmative action is not a perfect solution. But it works."

The Dec. 10 editorial isn't even honest. It asks readers to believe simultane-

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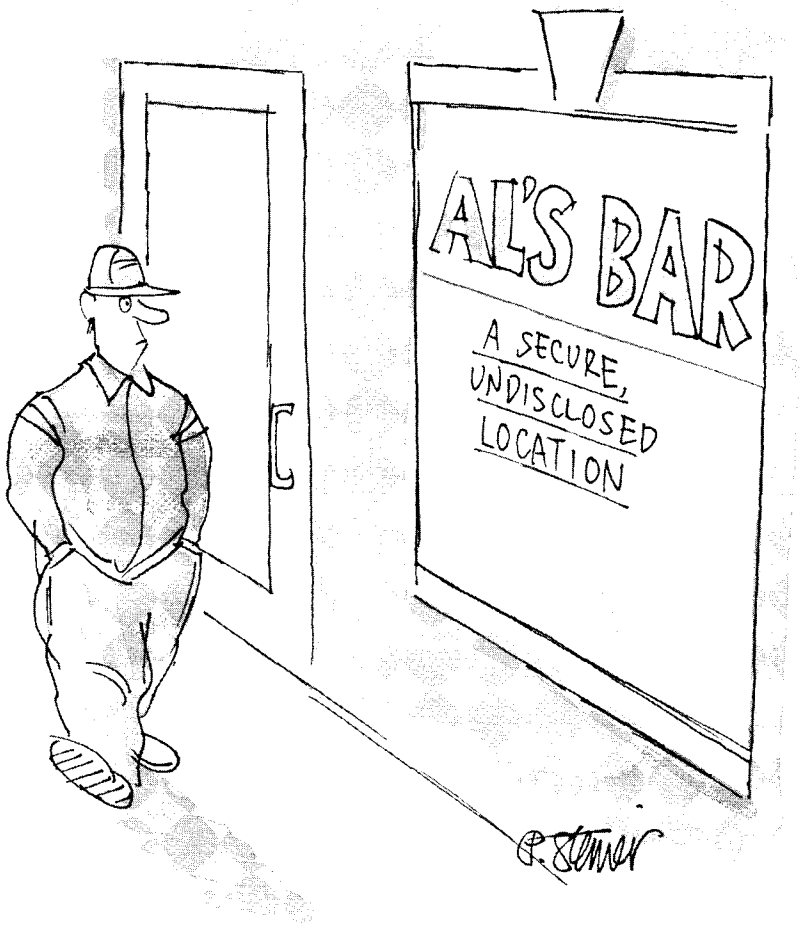

ously that affirmative action at Michigan gives only "a slight advantage, based on skin color" to students who still must "meet a high academic threshold"—and that virtually no minority students would attend the university without it. To end racial preferences, the piece asserts, would mean "forcing the university to turn back the clock three decades to a nearly all-white campus."

When publisher Silverman "reassigned" Bray, he assured THE WEEKLY STANDARD's Claudia Winkler (see "Jackasses Release Bray," May 15, 2000) that the paper's editorial page would not be departing from its proud conservative traditions. For proof, he said, "I would invite you to take a look at our editorial page in six months."

The operative words in that guarantee turned out to be "six months." A year and a half later, the page is all changed, changed utterly. ♦

Reading Without Money

Everyone who cares to know has known for years that money spent on education does not correlate with results. This finding hasn't discouraged the teachers' unions and other lobbyists for higher education spending, though it does tend to annoy them whenever the subject is raised. Mostly, though, they just pretend not to know about the disconnect between education spending and academic results.

In Europe, they take a more brazen approach. Eagle-eyed Mark Gauvreau Judge forwarded to us a story in the Dec. 5 issue of the *Irish Times*, reporting that Irish students rank second highest for reading and fifth for math among 32 industrial European countries. Cause for pride? No, cause for alarm. The report was from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. "But the OECD sounded a disapproving note," said the paper, "pointing out that education spending in the Republic [of Ireland] is significantly lower than in many developed states. It suggests that students here are forced to work harder to achieve their grades because of lack of investment."

It's the educrat's worst nightmare: hard-working kids achieving without high spending. Can't have that. We suspect this argument will become a popular European import on these shores. ♦

Our Egyptian Allies

The Associated Press last week reported on the "cat-and-mouse game" Egypt's most popular television commentator, Hamdi Qandil, is playing with censors at government-run Egyptian TV. For instance, when Qandil said that American food drops in Afghanistan are intended to "fatten them up before they slaughter them," it took him two tries to get it past the government censor.

"It's my pleasure if my program is responsible for more than 50 percent of anti-Americanism in Egypt," Qandil said. "The fact that my views are identical with my audience's is God's greatest gift to me." ♦

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Casual

Multiplex Blues

These spoiled-rotten kids today, with their stadium seating and Dolby Digital sound, not to mention the cappuccino at the concession stand and the ticket-takers who thank you for coming and the ushers who give you a nice mint as you leave. Will they ever know the sacrifices we older moviegoers once had to make?

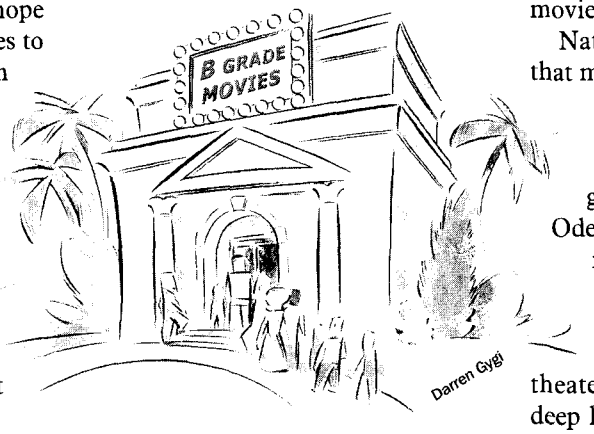
Will they ever feel the special anxiety that comes when the theater is filling up and the seat in front of you is still blissfully empty—how the hope that it will remain unoccupied goes to war with the fear that Kareem Abdul-Jabbar will sit there and completely block your view of the subtitles to the new Lina Wertmüller film?

Of course they won't, because every time *they* go to the movies each seat is on its own level, higher than the one in front of it. *They* can sit anywhere in these stadium-style seats without worrying about a pituitary case with a 10-gallon hat totally obstructing the screen.

Will they ever know the pain of a broken spring popping through the 50-year-old cushion just enough to let you know if you move even a millimeter, it will tear your pants? No, they won't, because every seat in every movie theater these days is plush and big, and the armrest even goes up so they can sprawl into the next seat or cuddle with their sweeties.

Will they ever hear a concessionaire saying there are no Raisinets left, only Jujubes—and just as the credits are rolling, feel the sticky and unwanted Jujube deftly pulling out $2,000 worth of dental work? They will ever be blissfully ignorant of such things, because today's concession stands are larger than most airports. There are ice-cream stations and soft-drink stations and a wall-sized unit full of individual candies. There are hot dogs and kielbasa, nachos with hot cheese. It's like a Vegas buffet, only in Vegas the buffets cost as much as these spoiled kids pay for a small popcorn.

The difference between moviegoing now and moviegoing 25 years ago is nothing short of astonishing. In the 1970s, the grand old movie palaces had either fallen into terrible disrepair, been chopped up haphazardly into three or four auditoriums with paper-thin walls between them, or been turned into inner-city churches, flea markets, and supermarkets.



There were new theaters, but they were horrible—ugly boxes built with crepe paper in mini-malls or stuffed into the nooks and crannies of office buildings. Their sound systems were about as good as an AM car radio's, and the seats were often laid out in gnarled patterns with structural pillars standing smack dab in the middle of the auditorium.

These anti-palaces joined the K-Car as objective correlatives of American decline in the 1970s, when businesses lost pride in themselves and did everything on the cheap.

Nobody could use the word "cheap" to describe today's palaces. In fact, they are so lavish that several major theater chains have gone bankrupt building them. The company that inaugurated the new trend was Boston-based National Amusements, which began putting up giant warehouse-like boxes at strategic suburban intersections in the early 1980s with 10 and 12 screens apiece.

These multiplexes weren't physically attractive, and they had horrible "art galleries" selling framed photos of Elvis. But the lobbies were so large that a moviegoer didn't have to wait outside if he arrived early, and they were filled with video games so teenagers had something to do between films. The candy counter sat in the middle and was laid out in the round with lots of pimply kids in uniform working efficiently. And the seats! They were soft and green and they rocked ever so slightly. And they cost twice as much as an ordinary movie-theater seat.

National Amusements discovered that moviegoers would drive long distances just to sit in those seats in its Showcase Cinemas and Multiplex Cinemas. Other growing chains, like Cineplex Odeon, built new venues with fancy marble lobbies and thick carpeting. Everybody began installing better sound systems. Now there are ultra-luxe theaters that offer waitress service, deep leather couches, and valet parking. And who knows what might come next.

Yeah, these kids today are spoiled, spoiled, spoiled. One thing though. Back in the uncomfortable 1970s, we crammed into uncomfortable seats with giants in front of us—and we got to see *The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part II* and *Taxi Driver* and *Annie Hall* and *Arthur* and *Amarcord* and *The Last Picture Show* and *Carrie* and *The Sting* and hundreds and hundreds of wonderful films that made you forget the broken spring in the seat.

The movies these kids today see in these glorious surroundings are the worst made in the 100-year history of the cinema. Maybe that's why the theaters have to be so nice—to distract their audiences from the cinematic misery unspooling inside.

John Podhoretz

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Terrorist Psychos

Paul R. McHugh's "A Psychiatrist Looks at Terrorism" (Dec. 10) made for entertaining reading, but I don't think it represents a true psychiatric perspective. Mainline psychiatric dogma would have defined terrorism in terms of genetic or developmental aberrations resulting in neurotransmitter imbalances requiring selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). McHugh, on the other hand, approaches terrorism in the same way that he seems to approach psychiatry: with common sense.

Michael Reznicek
Lewiston, ID

Anyone who takes what a psychiatrist says seriously about anything but what he has seen in his own office should have his head examined. That even applies to the distinguished Dr. Paul R. McHugh.

On the grounds that he is going to "defend [America] against confusion—and here America certainly needs help," McHugh promises to open our eyes "about what terrorists do, how they think, the steps necessary to protect ourselves from them . . . ," and he reassures us that this illumination will be based on "observations that . . . spring from long clinical experience with similar matters."

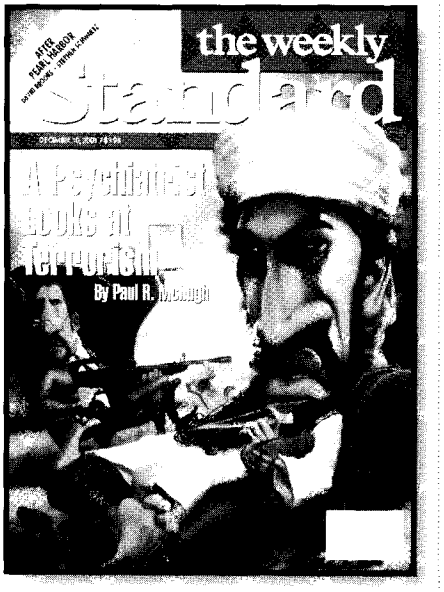
That is the last we hear about the doctor's "clinical experience." The only terrorist McHugh mentions by name is the Unabomber, and I would be reassured if he had clarified whether he had spent time interviewing the Unabomber clinically—even once.

We might infer from the cagey way in which McHugh avoids direct reference to any clinical observations ("I had the good fortune to have interviewed 37 terrorists; 35 males, 2 females from 7 different countries") that he has had no clinical experience with any terrorists, but has had some experience in the treatment of anorectics and alcoholics. These, he assumes, are very "similar matters" because terrorists are fanatics (despite never having examined a large number of them), and fanatics suffer from "overvalued ideas," as do the anorectics and alcoholics he has treated.

After laboriously arguing from one unsubstantiated jargon-laden notion to another, McHugh finally arrives at the conclusion we've been waiting for—a psychiatrist's way of dealing with terrorists, which is that ". . . to stop terrorism, the American government should devote its energies to interrupting the terrorists' behavior in all its aspects."

It is with this hackneyed, Polonius-like advice that McHugh proposes to "defend the nation" against confusion and the depredations of terror.

We should be grateful to McHugh and the editors of The Weekly Standard for demonstrating once again that psychiatrists, psychologists, psychoanalysts, social workers, psychiatric nurses, etc., have little or nothing to contribute to national political policy, and that attempts



to suggest that mental health experts know more about the affairs of the real world than any other informed citizen is a mischievous abuse of professionalism.

Yale Kramer
Professor Emeritus
University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey
New York, NY

Paul R. McHugh makes some good points, but I find his terrorism analysis unconvincing.

My visceral reaction to the collapse of the first tower was not entirely due to my comprehension of the massive death and pain inflicted. I also experienced a profound sense of embarrassment. They had taken one of our most prominent symbols and destroyed it. For weeks I longed for a similar event to occur somewhere in "their" realm. I was yearning not merely for the deaths of hated enemies, but for the highly visible destruction of their symbols as retaliation for the destruction of ours. It was not a logical wish, as the flattening of, let's say, the Kaaba, would be a terrible crime against humanity, regardless of whether anyone was killed. But I wanted it nonetheless.

I also find disappointing McHugh's dismissal of those who are concerned that iatrogenic effects will arise from military action. His assertion is that these concerns can be likened to those of a psychiatric patient's family for the patient's autonomy. So the patient is analogous to the terrorist, and the family to the Islamic world.

I presume that the prevailing wisdom in the psychiatric community is that the patient's family will eventually come around to the view that the treatment is for the good of the patient. Does McHugh think that the analogous change of heart will occur in the Islamic world? How soon?

Larry Edelstein
San Francisco, CA

Paul R. McHugh responds: To Larry Edelstein, I would say that it is not the Islamic world, but the Western world, that is my analog for interested parties fearful of the consequences of behavioral interruption. To Dr. Kramer's explosion I can only offer a modification of an aphorism of Samuel Johnson's: "Psychiatrists are an honest people. They never speak well of one another."

What We're All About

Now that The Scrapbook has smeared the Institute for Public Accuracy with a cartoonish, McCarthy-like article ("The All-News-Is-Bad-News Left," Dec. 3), readers are invited to find out what the institute actually does by visiting *www.accuracy.org* to take a look at our news releases that cover a wide range of subjects.

Norman Solomon
Institute for Public Accuracy
San Francisco, CA

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Love Tories

Michael Gonzalez is wrong to forecast a split between Republicans and British Conservatives ("The Blair Bitch Project," Dec. 10). Although New Labour—like the Democratic party—has come to shed much of its aversion to free trade, the military, and private enterprise, it remains smitten with multiculturalism and suspicious of patriotism and tradition. Meanwhile, Republicans and Tories detest multiculturalism and want to reduce taxes and government spending. Most importantly, both parties are unashamed of their respective countries' sovereignty, traditions, and culture.

Such a Republican-Tory split, unlikely and illogical though it is, would be mutually disastrous. Britain is currently our only ally able and inclined to fight in foreign wars for freedom and its national self-interest; but it cannot continue to be such an ally unless the Tories can keep Tony Blair from making Britain one of the many states in a soon-to-be united country called "Europe." Republicans should therefore help the Tories preserve an independent, classically liberal Britain.

Jason Boatright
Austin, TX

Oh What You Do Mickey

I read with interest Michael Linton's article on the collapse of Disneyland ("The Decline and Fall of Disneyland," Dec. 10). While I have never been to Disneyland, my wife and I and our four kids have spent more than 100 days of the last decade in Walt Disney World, and I sincerely doubt that Disney World is the joyful place my family loves while Disneyland has become a cesspool.

Linton misses Walt Disney's true purpose and achievement. Disney asked, roughly, "Where can a daddy, with two little girls, take them where he can have some fun, too?" That's the genius of Disney: The whole family, all ages, can have fun together.

The true beauty of Walt Disney World is not found by comparing today's parks with those in Linton's memories from the 1950s. It is found by comparing Disneyland then with America in the 1950s, and Disney theme parks today with America today. Disney then partook of the American values we all miss so much. Disney today still does, not perfectly, but far more than the alternatives, and a good deal more than America as a whole.

So listen to me, not depressing, killjoy Michael Linton: Go to Walt Disney World in the off-season, buy an annual pass, stay two weeks, and come back a little earlier the following year and do it again. The world will seem a better place as a result.

James Eckert
Rochester, NY

Does Michael Linton really think that kids were thinking of booby-traps and the Viet Cong while floating through Disneyland's jungle ride in 1969?

I went on the jungle ride in the late sixties, and I can assure you that Vietnam was the farthest thing from my mind. Of course I was about 12 years old, so my political knowledge was not as sophisticated as Linton's. I seriously doubt even many adults were thinking of Vietnam when taking the jungle ride.

This only goes to show how the left cannot let go of the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War colors their entire existence, especially in foreign policy matters. Maybe Disney CEO Michael Eisner will turn the jungle ride into a new attraction where al Qaeda fighters pop up from the river and spray riders with fake automatic weapons fire. Then special operations units could emerge from the jungle and take them out. He could rename the attraction "The bin Laden Hunter."

Bennett Parsons
Bermuda Dunes, CA

Pearl Harbor and 9/11

In "After Pearl Harbor" (Dec. 10), David Brooks paints a picture of decline: how brave and optimistic we were then versus how gloomy and self-doubting now. But, perhaps sharing The Weekly Standard's disdain for root causes, he neglects several realities of each period that explain much of this difference.

In 1941, the Great Depression was lifting thanks to the war boom, so Americans finally had some reason to be optimistic about their economic future. It would have been bizarre for them to indict their 1930s life as "soft, materialistic or corrupt" when it had actually been harsh. There was similar reason to be optimistic about the war, since the United States' previous conflict had been World War I, in which we had entered late, suffered few casualties, and won a huge victory. Since then, we have experienced Korea and Vietnam, and have come to realize that wars can devolve into bloody stalemates. Finally, the civilian population was at little risk in 1941, which is obviously not the case today.

Brooks correctly says that we can't afford to obsess about our failings when we need resolution and action. But a healthy dose of realism can prevent future blunders.

Jay Weiser
Associate Professor of Law
Baruch College
New York, NY

Correction

Because of an editing error in the December 17 issue of The Weekly Standard, Johanna Spyri was named as the author of Johann David Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson*. Spyri is the author of *Heidi*, that other popular Swiss children's book of the nineteenth century.

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the weekly Standard

Berry Bad Behavior

Last week the White House made a down payment on President Bush's promise that due-process protections would be extended even to the most fanatic current enemies of U.S. policy. No, we don't mean the Justice Department's December 11 indictment of Zacarias Moussaoui, the alleged "twentieth man" in the New York and Washington terrorist plots. We have in mind, instead, a move announced the day before: the administration's decision to forgo a military tribunal in favor of regular federal district court proceedings against Mary Frances Berry.

Ms. Berry has lately holed herself up at 624 Ninth Street, N.W., in Washington, D.C., headquarters of the radical cell she leads, otherwise known as the "U.S. Commission on Civil Rights." From there she has vowed to resist the authority of American law by any means necessary. Which is lunacy, really: This is just a *personnel dispute*, after all, and Berry's position is plainly illegal. We'd say the Bush administration has responded to her provocations with altogether remarkable restraint. That Berry is being supported in her war against the government by congressional Democrats, on the other hand, is . . . well, we're not sure what to make of that, but it's nothing to be proud of.

Since Bill Clinton made her chairman, Mary Frances Berry has run the Civil Rights Commission like a third-world potentate.

Before we get to the particulars, some necessary background: Congress chartered the Civil Rights Commission in 1957 as an executive branch "clearinghouse" on American race relations. Under its authorizing statute, the commission was to deliver a report on that subject by the end of 1959, and two months later it would "cease to exist." The report was completed on schedule. But the "cease to exist" part was delayed for . . . well, several decades, actually. During which time the agency did a slow dissolve from irrelevance to incompetence to outright embarrassment—its "research" increasingly indistinguishable from interest-group agitprop.

By the early 1980s, the commission having long since outlived its usefulness, the Reagan administration proposed finally to suspend its operations. But a Democratic Congress seized on that plan as evidence of alleged Republican hostility to racial and ethnic minorities and women. Cowed by the charge, the Reagan White House effected a full-bore retreat and approved a humiliating 1983 "compromise" in which the Civil Rights Commission was deliberately insulated against future such threats to its "independence." Specifically, the administrative structure of the agency was amended by law to provide for a strictly bipartisan group of eight commissioners, four each appointed by the president and Congress, and all serving staggered, six-year terms.

It is important to point out, for reasons that will become obvious in a moment, that the idea for this scheme of staggered terms, according to an official House of Representatives report on the 1983 "reauthorization," came from Mary Frances Berry, a 1980 Carter appointee to the commission.

Mary Berry is a freakish anomaly in the permanent-insider culture of Washington politics. For one thing, she has managed to survive on the federal payroll through a quarter century and five presidencies despite having accumulated a record of rhetorical irresponsibility, devoid of compensating accomplishment, that would make Al Sharpton blush. Furthermore, Berry is widely loathed for her propensity to call people who frustrate her whims "racists" or "Uncle Toms." Character flaws like these ordinarily make for a justly abbreviated political career. But Democratic party leaders have consistently ignored this rule in Berry's case, propping her up on the apparent assumption that her continued presence on the Civil Rights Commission does them some partisan good.

They are quite wrong about that, we think; the only thing Democrats have earned from their alliance with Mary Frances Berry is shared responsibility for the abject

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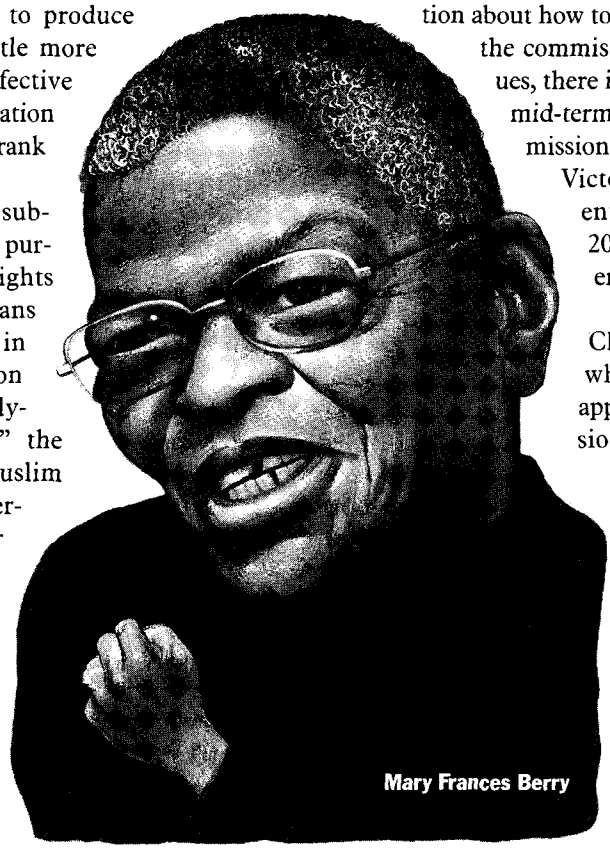
collapse of an already dysfunctional federal agency. Since being made chairman by President Clinton in 1993—against the stated wishes of her commission colleagues—Berry has run the place like a third-world potentate, employing "haphazard or nonexistent" management rules, in the words of a devastating 1997 General Accounting Office audit, to crush even the mildest dissent. True professionals do not flourish in such an environment; turnover among senior civil servants on the commission's staff has been epidemic. And, consequently, what limited work the agency has managed to produce these past few years reflects little more than Mary Frances Berry's defective personality: her peculiar combination of single-minded extremism and rank ineptitude.

Thus, the recent series of substance-free commission "studies" purporting to criticize the civil rights records of prominent Republicans who just happen to be involved in nationally significant election races. Thus, too, the much ballyhooed "discrimination hotline" the commission established for Muslim and Arab Americans in the aftermath of September 11, which for some reason connected callers to a dating service promising introductions to "exciting people."


Mary Frances Berry

How, you ask, if the Civil Rights Commission's authorizing legislation forbids more than half its members from belonging to a single political party, has Mary Frances Berry been able to have her way with the agency to such an extent? Simple: During the Clinton years, the White House and Hill Democrats were careful to stack the commission with nominal "independents" who wouldn't count against this legal ceiling but could nevertheless be depended on to cast their votes as Mary Berry wished. In other words, so long as there was a Democratic president exercising control over four commission appointees, Berry's rule was absolute.

You can probably guess the rest. George W. Bush is not a Democrat. So Mary Frances Berry, more or less predictably, has decided to ignore the law that grants him authority to depose her dictatorship. In January 2000, President Clinton had appointed New York book editor—and Berry ally—Victoria Wilson to the civil rights panel "for the remainder of the term expiring November 29, 2001," a slot left open by the death of commission incumbent Leon Higginbotham. Earlier this month, the Higginbotham/Wilson term having duly expired, President Bush named Cleveland attorney Peter Kirsanow as a replacement. Kirsanow is the commission's fourth Republican, and thus a mortal threat to Mary Berry. Who has responded by refusing to seat him at commission business meetings—and by somehow persuading a puppet-like Victoria Wilson to stick around in his place.

Berry's "argument," such as it is, is preposterous. Technical amendments Congress made to her agency's charter in 1994, she points out, removed an explicit instruction about how to handle mid-term vacancies on the commission. Therefore, Berry continues, there is no longer any such thing as a mid-term vacancy, and every new commissioner is entitled to a full six years. Victoria Wilson, in particular, is entitled to serve until January 2006. And Peter Kirsanow isn't entitled to serve at all.

Except that he is. President Clinton knew perfectly well what the law was when he appointed Wilson to the commission for an abbreviated two-year term. Congress knew perfectly well what it was doing in 1994 when it amended that law—an attempt, according to contemporaneous Judiciary Committee records, merely to eliminate "unnecessary procedural provisions" while "retain[ing] the current organization structure" of "staggered terms." And Mary Frances Berry knows perfectly well what she is doing today: violating the law so as to destroy, for her own convenience, the same system of staggered terms she herself proposed, again for her own convenience, in 1983.

During a telephone conversation two weeks ago, Berry told an astonished White House counsel Alberto Gonzalez that armed federal marshals would be required to physically remove Victoria Wilson from the commission and secure Peter Kirsanow in her place. The Bush administration has wisely declined that invitation, and has sued Victoria Wilson instead. It will take many months, no doubt, but the White House will win this case. When it does, if not before, President Bush should at long last remove Mary Frances Berry from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights—for "malfeasance in office," consistent with a provision of the agency's charter that unquestionably remains the law, right there in black and white.

—David Tell, for the Editors

Illustration by Earl Keleny

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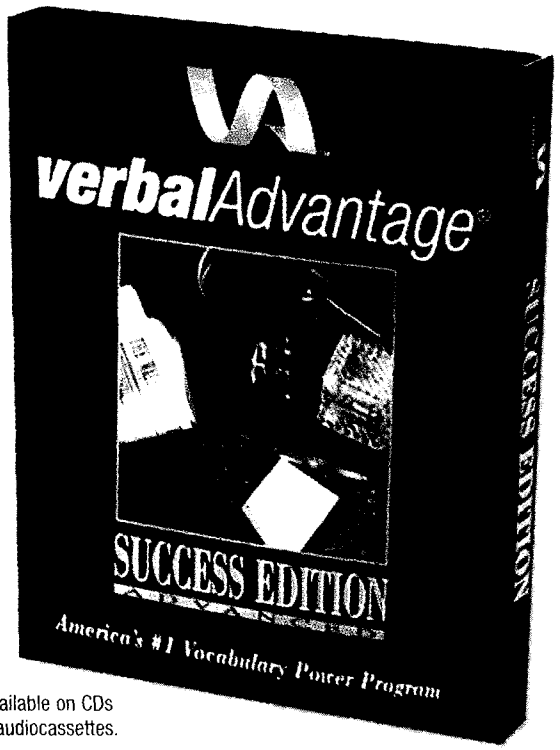

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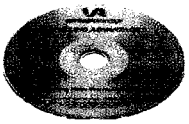

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Blocking Bush's Nominees

Lots of advice from Senate Democrats but little consent. BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

When Senator Patrick Leahy gaveled the Judiciary Committee to order on Monday, December 10, he began by marshalling several excuses for his inaction on President Bush's judicial nominees. Actually, to be precise, he first denied that Senate Democrats were holding up Bush's nominations. Then he ticked off reasons for the unprecedented delays. The September 11 attacks, Leahy growled, slowed up everything. The deadly anthrax letter mailed to his office didn't help either. In short, he argued, the problem was time.

Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle voiced the same concern when he notified the Bush administration that its longest-delayed executive branch appointee would not get a floor vote. A vote could lead to a "lengthy debate" over the nominee's qualifications, and the Senate apparently can't spare the time.

At first blush, Democrats' excuses for delays on the president's judicial and executive branch nominees might seem reasonable. We are at war, after all.

But Senate Democrats have found time to honor Barry Bonds for "his spectacular record-breaking season in 2001 and outstanding career in Major League Baseball." The Democratic agenda-setters managed to squeeze in the Railroad Retirement Act, a pork-laden "stimulus package," and subsidies to bison farmers. Senator Leahy himself worked hard to win $1.5 million for the revitalization of Winooski, Vermont, a town of 6,600.

Stephen F. Hayes is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard.

Democrats achieved all of this before they got around to allowing the president a full cabinet. That breakthrough came on December 5—more than 10 months after Bush's inauguration—when John Walters was finally confirmed as drug czar.

The administration has thus far been patient about its nominees, consumed as it has been by the war on terrorism. But with numerous executive branch appointees lost in a Senate black hole, and with the federal judiciary losing judges faster than it is replacing them, all of that could change.

"There are plenty of indications that most likely the administration is going to ramp this stuff up after the holidays," says a senior GOP leadership aide. When they do, they may get some help from Georgia Democrat Zell Miller, who says he's fed up with the games his party is playing.

"Not even having the decency to give his appointees a straight up-or-down vote is a shabby and scandalous way to treat a president of the United States," says Sen. Miller. "And I'll just tell you that it gives me pause, not to mention some shame, that I find myself a part of the caucus responsible for such conduct."

How much pause? No one is sure. Before the attacks, it was rumored that Miller might switch parties, giving control of the Senate back to Republicans. But it's a topic few have raised publicly of late.

Still, if nothing else, Miller's comments offer a reminder to Democrats like Daschle, Leahy, and Christopher Dodd that their party remains in the majority by just one vote.

When White House spokesman Ari Fleischer scolded Senate Democrats for blocking presidential nominees at his briefing on Friday, he mentioned only two names: Eugene Scalia and Otto Reich. Scalia is Bush's pick to be the top legal adviser at the Department of Labor; Reich was tapped to head the Western Hemispheric affairs shop at the State Department. Theirs will be two of the hottest confirmation battles in the days to come.

Fred McClure, a top congressional liaison for the first Bush White House, says both parties make use of such high-profile battles. "They help their money-raising operations. These are the PR battles meant to fire up the troops," says McClure, who helped guide Clarence Thomas through his contentious hearings ten years ago and was called upon again to shepherd John Ashcroft's nomination earlier this year.

Both Scalia and Reich have more than enough votes to be confirmed, and the Democrats won't permit votes on them for precisely that reason. The Bush administration is seriously weighing options—including recess appointments—to allow the two to do their jobs.

Back in 1995, when Republicans slowed the nomination of Dr. Henry Foster to assume the basically meaningless post of surgeon general, no one was more aggrieved than Connecticut Democrat Christopher Dodd.

"The idea that you would even block consideration of this person from having a vote on the floor of the Senate is childish and wrong and certainly brings disgrace on this institution," Dodd fulminated.

Foster's nomination languished after he was found to have been less than candid about his past. But Foster at least got a hearing, something that Dodd today stubbornly denies Otto Reich. In one of the quirkier rules of the Senate, individual senators can place a perma-hold on nominations they find objectionable. Dodd last month told his local paper, the *Hart-*

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ford Courant, "That nomination's not going anywhere, that's the end of it."

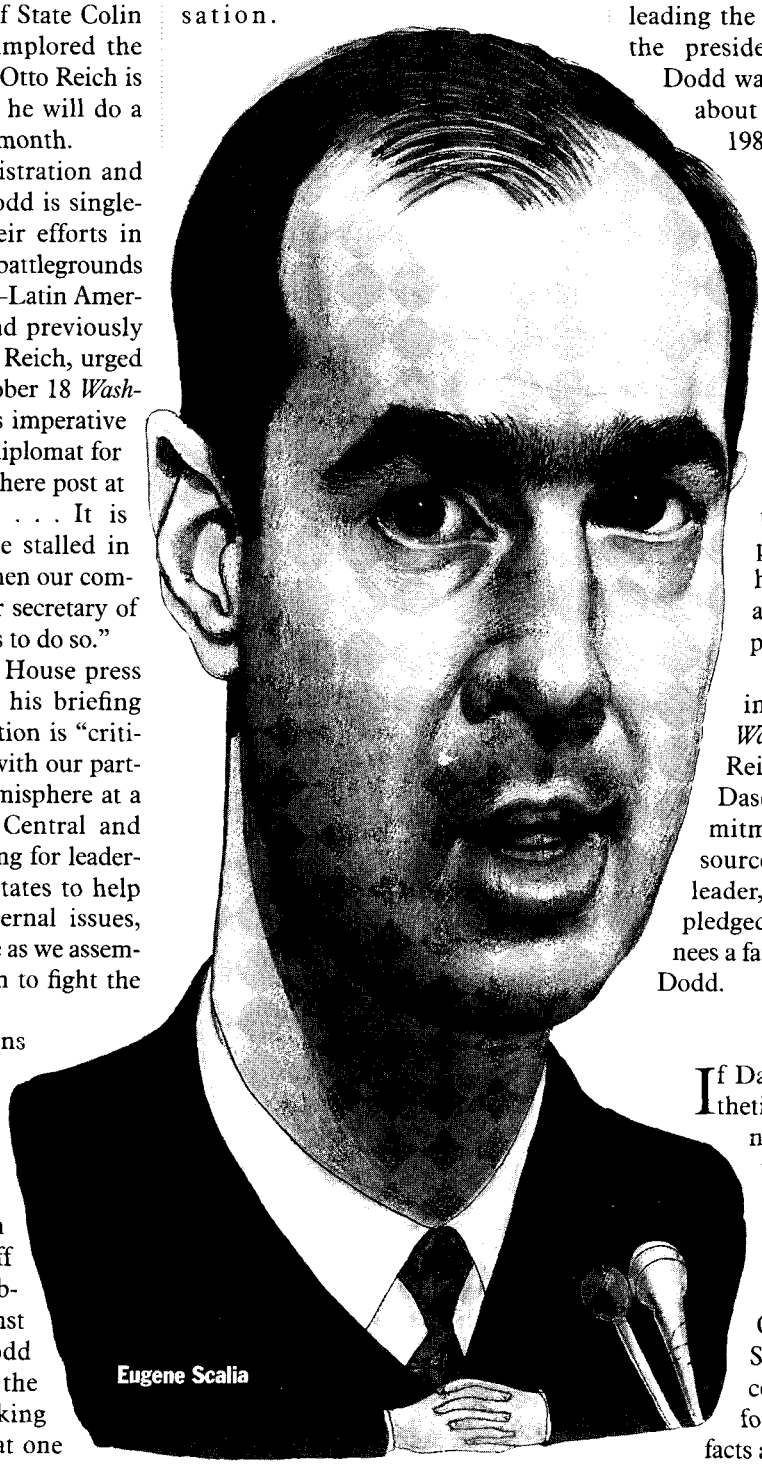
Reich is unquestionably qualified for the job. A Cuban refugee who came to this country as a child, he worked in the State Department's office of public diplomacy in the first Reagan term, and served as ambassador to Venezuela in the second. He has been consistently and strongly anti-Castro. Secretary of State Colin Powell has repeatedly implored the Senate to confirm him. "Otto Reich is an honorable man, and he will do a terrific job," he said last month.

Others in the administration and in Congress say that Dodd is single-handedly thwarting their efforts in one of the next possible battlegrounds in the war on terrorism—Latin America. Zell Miller, who had previously indicated his support of Reich, urged Senate action in an October 18 *Washington Times* op-ed. "It is imperative that we install a strong diplomat for the top Western Hemisphere post at the State Department. . . . It is deplorable that we have stalled in filling this critical job when our commander in chief and our secretary of state have been urging us to do so."

Fleischer, the White House press secretary, chimed in at his briefing last Friday. Reich's position is "critical to our relationships with our partners in the Western Hemisphere at a time when nations in Central and Latin America are looking for leadership from the United States to help them with difficult internal issues, and this is especially true as we assemble a worldwide coalition to fight the war against terrorism."

Reich's qualifications alone make it something of a travesty that Dodd is blocking his nomination. But Dodd is doing more than simply keeping Reich from his job. He and his staff have waged a vicious, public smear campaign against Reich. In October, Dodd wrote a long letter to the *Wall Street Journal* making his case against Reich, at one point suggesting Reich has a history of coddling terrorists.

Given the events of the past three months, this would be an extraordinarily harsh claim if made in a congressional hearing. (A Bush official working on the Reich nomination says "the entire letter did not have one true charge in it.") But at least at a hearing, Reich could answer the accusation.



Eugene Scalia

Illustration by Earl Keleny

As Dodd surely knows, Reich is muzzled by the longstanding tradition that nominees remain silent until their confirmation hearing, and then again until they are confirmed. Reich is itching to defend himself, but the White House has told him to sit tight.

For now, others are fighting for him. "It's a macho thing, that's it," says Arizona senator Jon Kyl, who is leading the charge in the Senate for the president's nominees. "Chris Dodd wants to refight the battles about Central America in the 1980s. That's all this is."

In addition to Zell Miller, several other Democratic senators have indicated publicly that they will vote for Reich. They include Floridians Bill Nelson and Bob Graham, and New Jersey's Bob Torricelli, all of whom hail from states with influential Cuban-American populations. Still others have given Reich private assurances of their support.

Daschle, after Dodd's intemperate letter to the *Wall Street Journal*, invited Reich to meet with him. Daschle made no firm commitment to help Reich. But sources say that the majority leader, having previously pledged to give qualified nominees a fair hearing, was upset with Dodd.

If Daschle is at least sympathetic to Reich, he has shown no such inclination toward Eugene Scalia, Bush's nominee to be solicitor at the Department of Labor. Scalia is the son of Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia, and he has been in confirmation purgatory for 33 weeks. Those two facts are directly related.

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Scalia's nomination was passed out of Senator Ted Kennedy's Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in early October. Kennedy voted against him, but nonetheless praised him as an "outstanding lawyer." Cass Sunstein, a law professor at the University of Chicago known for his liberal views, says of Scalia: "In terms of sheer capacity to do a fine job, he's as good a choice as can be imagined."

But shortly after Scalia's committee hearing, even in the bipartisan glow of post-attack Washington, Capitol Hill was abuzz with rumors that he would be roughed up before he was given a floor vote. On December 4, Daschle announced that Scalia wouldn't even be that lucky—there would be no floor vote at all.

Daschle's public statements about the Scalia nomination have an interesting, circular quality.

"You know, I have to be convinced that the votes are there, and I don't think the votes are there for Mr. Scalia today," he said. Democrats weren't supportive of Scalia, Daschle declared, "especially given his position on ergonomics."

When Bob Novak challenged Daschle on Scalia and ergonomics a week later on CNN, the majority leader elaborated.

"He has said that not only would he oppose ergonomics, but he would—the impression he has left many of us is that he would even oppose the implementation, the administration of the rules that already exist."

He finished, though, right where he had started, telling Novak he "didn't think the votes were there for Mr. Scalia."

But the votes are there, of course, and that's why Daschle refuses to permit a floor vote: Scalia would be confirmed. "If the votes are not there, let's have a vote, up or down—not on a filibuster, up or down—and if he doesn't have the votes, we'll be satisfied," says Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott. "If they're willing to vote against this well-qualified, very intelligent young man to be the solicitor general of the Department of Labor, then fine. Let's have the vote."

Daschle's comments on ergonomics are almost as disingenuous. Scalia opposed Clinton-administration ergonomics regulations that were not only rejected by a majority in Congress, they were widely mocked as a quintessential bureaucratic overreach.

And what about Daschle's third point, that Scalia has "left the impression" that he won't enforce Labor laws? A senior administration official dismisses that claim as "a lie," and recommends that Daschle reread Scalia's testimony.

Scalia, in his opening statement at his October 2 confirmation hearing, left himself no wiggle room on enforcement. He said the first responsibility of the solicitor is "to enforce the nearly 200 laws administered by the department." Moments later, he was more emphatic. "If confirmed, I pledge to enforce those laws vigorously," he testified.

The confirmation battles over Reich and Scalia will indicate how hard George W. Bush is prepared to fight for his nominees.

By late last week, Daschle opened the door just a crack, saying he'd consider a Scalia vote. "I think it's always been clear that there are some nominations that are very, very controversial and would probably require 60 votes," he said Friday, referring to the number of votes required to make a nominee filibuster-proof. "And whether Mr. Scalia has 60 votes is unclear."

That shouldn't matter, says Stuart Roy, a spokesman for the Department of Labor. "We wholly reject the notion that Sen. Daschle can determine which nominees require 51 votes and which nominees require 60 votes."

So what are the real reasons for the obstruction? "A fight on Scalia gets labor issues involved," says one nominations veteran. "He brings back *Bush* v. *Gore* in the news. And if Bush wants to think about making [Antonin] Scalia chief justice"—assuming Chief Justice William Rehnquist retires, as expected—"this is a good warning shot."

Senator Judd Gregg, a New Hampshire Republican, sees the matter as open and shut: "The only thing that is holding Scalia from being confirmed is the fact that he is the son of his father, Judge Scalia."

Bush advisers are seriously considering recess appointments of Reich, Scalia, and others. They are careful to point out, however, that this would be a last resort.

But Daschle has recently hinted at his willingness to forgo a Senate recess for the holidays in order to block the president from making those temporary appointments. Republicans think they can get around any such procedural maneuver with tricks of their own. And, warns one administration official, "there are other options that we don't want to talk about just yet."

The confirmation battles for Reich and Scalia are important not only because they concern two highly qualified individuals who would serve the president well, but because they will indicate how strongly George W. Bush will fight for his embattled nominees. With groups like the National Organization for Women and others announcing campaigns to scuttle many of Bush's current judicial nominees, it is clear that these clashes are a preview of more intense fights to come—especially for the Supreme Court.

All of this becomes moot, of course, if the Democrats' stalling gives Zell Miller so much "pause" that he leaves their caucus and hands control of the Senate back to Republicans. The greatest hope of Senate Republicans, administration officials, and the nominees themselves is that January turns out to be Miller time. ♦

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Rumsfeld's Just War

Generals meet theologians at the Pentagon.

BY JOE LOCONTE

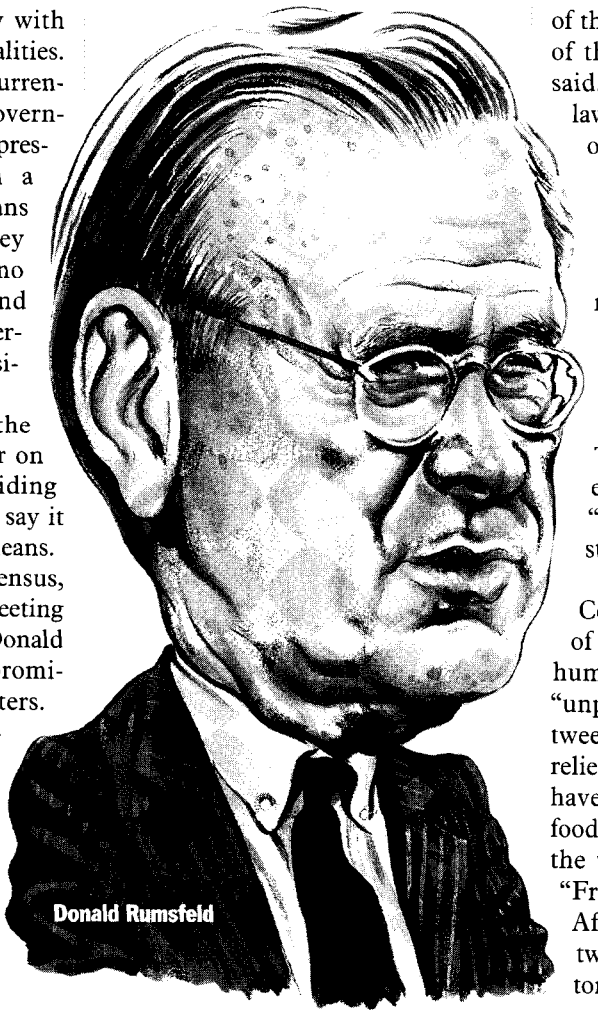
CRITICS of the U.S. war in Afghanistan have been wrong about virtually everything. They predicted that a Soviet-style quagmire awaited American troops; that chaos on the ground would turn millions of Afghans into refugees; and that tens of thousands of civilians would be killed by errant U.S. bombs. They saw a conflict that would be immoral in its effect, if not its intent.

Little more than two months after the first bombs fell, U.S. forces have guided rebel troops to victory with just a handful of American fatalities. The Taliban's army has fled or surrendered in droves, and their government, a case study in Islamic repression, has collapsed. Though a frightening number of Afghans are at risk of starvation (as they were before September 11), no mass exodus has occurred—and the fall of the regime makes emergency relief efforts infinitely easier.

Perhaps most important, the United States has waged a war on terrorists while mostly avoiding civilian casualties—which is to say it is fighting a just war with just means.

That seemed to be the consensus, at least, at a recent Pentagon meeting between Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and about a dozen prominent religious leaders and writers. Prison Fellowship's Chuck Colson, citing Christian theologians who first defined the moral limits of warfare, said the U.S. campaign "would fit the Augustinian-Aquinas playbook perfectly."

Rumsfeld invited the eclectic group—some representing religious bodies critical of U.S. actions—for a frank discussion of the war on terrorism. His guests included the Right Reverend Jane Holmes Dixon of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington; Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua of the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia; evangelicals Colson and Franklin Graham of Samaritan's Purse; M. Bruce Lustig, senior rabbi of the Washington Hebrew Congregation; Imam Khoj, director of the Islamic Center of Washington; and journalists Deal Hudson of *Crisis* magazine and myself.



Donald Rumsfeld

Illustration by Drew Friedman

Joe Loconte is the William E. Simon fellow in religion and a free society at the Heritage Foundation.

If anyone was expecting evasive talk about "collateral damage," it didn't happen. Instead, Vice Admiral Thomas Ray Wilson, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, explained in detail how military targets are chosen. Damage estimates to enemy forces are measured against possible harm to innocents before every strike. War planes, including fighter jets as well as B-52 heavy bombers, focus on narrowly defined areas. Strike times are varied to minimize risks to civilians. Intelligence sometimes scuttles attack plans at the last moment.

It's a policy, we were reminded, that carries a cost. "We slow the pace of the campaign and increase the risk of the people executing it," Wilson said. "But we do this because of the laws of armed conflict and because of our own moral values." The result, despite Taliban tales to the contrary, is that remarkably few non-combatants have been caught in the crossfire—the first requirement for fighting a just war.

Critics also warned that U.S. military tactics would unleash a nightmare of humanitarian ills. The liberal magazine *Sojourners* even assailed the United States for "standing in the way of feeding starving people."

But at the Pentagon briefing, Joe Collins, deputy assistant secretary of defense for peacekeeping and humanitarian affairs, described "unprecedented coordination" between the military and emergency relief teams. U.S. planes, for example, have dropped roughly 2.3 million food packages into the country since the war began. The opening of the "Friendship Bridge" into northern Afghanistan from Uzbekistan just two weeks ago has allowed 42,000 tons of food into the neediest parts

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of the country. Later this month, the United States will join an international conference in Europe to help secure billions of dollars for reconstruction efforts.

Immense problems still plague the Afghan people—disease, malnutrition, homelessness—but their causes lie elsewhere. More than two decades of war, four years of drought, and five years of Islamic tyranny have created a humanitarian crisis affecting millions. "The Taliban did their absolute best to interfere with humanitarian assistance to their own people," Collins said. "It's almost impossible to overstate how bad things are."

Nevertheless, the situation is slowly stabilizing. Food and medical convoys are finally getting into the country unimpeded. Order is being restored. As Rumsfeld put it: "There probably will be the least violent change of power in Afghanistan in modern times." That's no small accomplishment, and it fits the just war principle of proportionality: The use of force must not produce more evil than it would prevent.

The Pentagon briefing concluded with a discussion of the next phase in the war against terror: going after the bad guys in other states and striking those who give them safe haven. Two days after the September 11 attacks, President Bush promised that the United States would move against not only the al Qaeda network, but "those who fund them, hide them, and encourage them." Virtually every senior administration official has repeated the threat. Rumsfeld was asked if he believed preemptive strikes against rogue states such as Iraq were likely.

He immediately recalled Israel's 1981 bombing raid on Iraq's nuclear facility. Absent that setback for Saddam Hussein, he said, U.S. troops in the Gulf War would have faced a nuclear-armed Iraqi army. The lesson: When extremists are seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction, what otherwise would look like an offensive strike is, strategically speaking, defensive.

"Self-defense means you must go after them. You don't have a choice. And that gets you to preemptive strikes," Rumsfeld said. "It's not a tough call for me." Neither does it appear to be for President Bush. He bluntly warns that terrorists are prepared "to turn their hatred into holocaust." And he challenges nations to pick sides: "Every nation now knows that we cannot accept—we will not accept—states that harbor, finance, train, or equip the agents of terror," he told military students at the Citadel on December 11. "Those nations that violate this principle will be regarded as hostile regimes . . . and they will be held to account."

If the Bush-Rumsfeld doctrine is correct, it would seem to pass the just war test of last resort—that military action is the only way to prevent great evil. Neither negotiations nor endless searches for the "root causes" of terrorism will do the job. ♦

Recruiting an Iraqi Opposition

Is General Khazraji the right man to liberate Baghdad? BY ELI J. LAKE

GENERAL NIZAR AL-KHAZRAJI, chief of staff of Saddam Hussein's army when Iraq invaded Kuwait, lives in a suburb of Copenhagen called Soroe. There, four Danish police officers guard him round-the-clock, while the Danish Ministry of Justice investigates his role in massacres against the Kurds over 13 years ago.

This Danish probe is complicating American efforts to effect regime-change in Baghdad. Some in the State Department and in the Iraqi opposition see Khazraji as a leading candidate for membership in a group of ex-Iraqi military officers meant to replace Saddam's army if and when U.S. plans to oust the Iraqi dictator move forward.

A leading member of the Iraqi National Liberal Movement, a group formed last year by Sunni exiles, says his organization is sending a delegation to Copenhagen this month to see if the old general will join them. "I think it is important in this period of time to locate professional people for a military opposition," Thair al-Nakib told me.

And Khazraji is nothing if not a professional officer. He is the highest-ranking military man ever to defect from Iraq, where his term as chief of staff ran from 1987 till 1990. When he fled Iraq through Kurdish territory in 1996, he was courted briefly by the CIA as a possible candidate to lead a foray from Jordan into Iraq, the hope being that a man of his stature would attract military defectors along the way. But those plans went sour after Khazraji, according to one former CIA official familiar with the discussions, demanded total control over the operation and an unlimited budget. From 1996 until very recently, he has refused to speak out against Saddam. He led a reclusive life in Spain until 1999, when he fled to Denmark—he said to escape threats on his life.

The State Department, too, has tried to enlist Khazraji in the opposition. In 1999, the State Department's coordinator for an Iraqi transition, Frank Ricciardone, attempted to contact him through third parties, even recommending Khazraji for a military commission with the Iraqi National Congress, the American-

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funded opposition group led by Ahmad Chalabi.

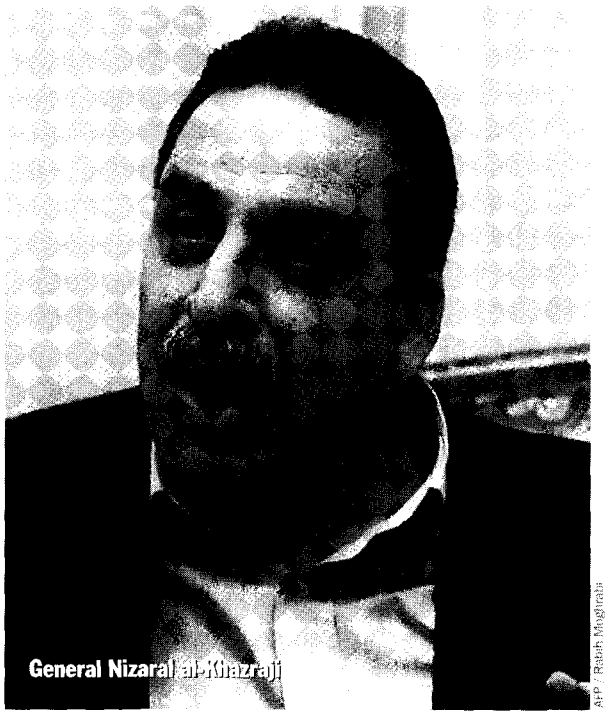
Now the State Department is making subtle efforts to build such an opposition group outside the Iraqi National Congress, through the Middle East Institute. On December 7, this Washington think tank hosted its second meeting of ex-Iraqi military officials in five weeks. The seminar attracted representatives of three separate Iraqi military exile groups, the Iraqi National Accord, the Free Officers Movement, and the Iraqi Officers Movement. Also present were representatives of the two ruling Kurdish parties in northern Iraq, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdish Democratic party, as well as five State Department officials and an analyst from the Pentagon's National Defense University.

David Mack, who organized the meeting for the institute, has never met Khazraji but says of him, "Khazraji has the right ingredients. He is a former senior military officer with a good military reputation, and he defected early enough so no one could say he was a traitor at Iraq's time of need." Indeed, Mack tried to invite Khazraji to the United States as early as 1999 but could not find him.

With the investigation in Denmark now under way, the State Department is agnostic on the old general. "We know who he is, we know what he represents, but we haven't taken an official position on this yet," a State Department spokesman said Wednesday. "There have been human rights and war crimes charges leveled against him, and we are interested in addressing that issue. That said, we do have an interest in working with as broad an Iraqi opposition group as possible."

Khazraji kept fairly quiet until the left-of-center Danish newspaper *Politiken* published a story on September 16 claiming that he was the field commander when Saddam's army killed up to 3,000 Kurds with mustard gas and nerve gas in Halabja on March 16, 1988. After the story appeared, Khazraji gave two interviews to the Middle East Broadcasting Center, an Arab television channel based in London, and denied any role in the Halabja massacre.

But there are atrocities against the Kurds for which Khazraji may be more responsible. He led Iraq's army during the infamous "Anfal" campaign (named for the chapter in the Koran dealing with the spoils of war), in which the military rounded up countless Kurds from villages in the north and handed them over to the secret police. In secret-police custody, the Kurds were shipped to prisons and detainment centers in southern Iraq, where they were eventually executed. Human Rights Watch estimates the death toll at 100,000 in the campaign, which lasted from February 23 to September 6, 1988.


General Nizar al-Khazraji

AFP / Rabih Moghrabi

Joost Hilterman, the Human Rights Watch researcher who analyzed the documents on the Anfal, concluded Khazraji's culpability is questionable. "The information that we have shows that he was involved in serious activities, but I can't say he was a war criminal," he said Wednesday. Hilterman said his organization is waiting for the results of the Danish investigation to make a more definitive statement.

The two major Kurdish opposition groups in northern Iraq take a different view. In a letter dated October 10, the head of the Kurdish Democratic party's International Relations Bureau told Danish minister of justice Frank Jensen, "We strongly believe that these attempts to undermine the reputation of Gen. al-Khazraji play into the hands of Saddam Hussein's regime to discourage other Iraqi officials to defect and join the Iraqi democratic opposition."

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan feels the same way. Mohammad Sabir, the director of the PUK office in Washington, says, "We don't want to take any action against the defected military people who worked in the Iraqi army because if you do, it will help Saddam Hussein." In his discussions with the State Department, he says, U.S. diplomats were also of this view.

But not all Kurds agree. Another exile group, the Kurdish National Congress, called for an investigation of the former general. In a letter to Danish prime minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen dated October 30, the president of the KNC, Ismet Cheriff Vanly, wrote, "On behalf of the Kurdish people and the Kurdish victims, I urge you, Mr. Prime Minister, to be kindly willing to take all appropriate measures so that a criminal investigation be opened against Nizar al-Khazraji, with a view to hand him over to a criminal Danish court, for punishment according to the law of your country."

Whether the rebels and the State Department ever recruit their man may hinge on the outcome of that investigation. ♦

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Tony Blair's Third Way to Nowhere

He's a foreign policy star, but his domestic agenda's in shambles. BY DANIEL CASSE

London

SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, British prime minister Tony Blair has enjoyed, in the eyes of Americans, his finest hour. His appearance in the Capitol gallery during President Bush's war address to a joint session of Congress marked a spirit of U.S.-British cooperation and goodwill that recalled the final years of World War II. Since then, Blair's emotional speeches on the moral case for the war and his willingness to send British troops to combat have suggested the possibility of a new Atlantic alliance and a deeper Bush-Blair partnership. A recent Harris poll found that of the 75 percent of Americans who had seen or heard Blair, 89 percent had a positive impression.

Yet the statesmanship Americans have come to admire has found no parallel back in the U.K. Less than six months after Blair led his Labour party to a second massive victory over the deeply fractured Tories, his domestic agenda is in tatters. Tensions with his colleague and rival, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, make daily headlines. The public is firmly against his plan to have Britain join the European single currency. Rumors abound that before the next election the prime minister will step down to seek the presidency of the European Commission.

Blair's troubles ought to be instructive to the American political class so enamored of his style of politics. Before long President Bush may turn his attention to domestic issues to avoid the post-Gulf War omissions of his father. With a Democratic majority in the Senate eager for power-sharing and media limelight, Washington sages will point to the need to reach accommodation with Tom Daschle on a new set of policy goals that can win bipartisan support. It is only a matter of time before someone suggests that Blair's much-vaunted "Third Way" serves as a guide for a postwar agenda.

Yet after five years, it is clear that the "Blair project" is little more than a PR campaign. Despite speeches filled with rhetoric about change, modernization, and rejecting the extremes of right and left, the British prime minister has shown a persistent unwillingness to bring meaningful reform to Britain's failed social programs. Blair's is precisely the type of empty "middle path" that Bush needs to avoid.

Blair's most prominent failure is also the one causing the most controversy: the precarious state of the National Health Service. Although long considered a politically untouchable institution with which even Thatcher's Tories dared not meddle, the single-payer system established after World War II has become a public embarrassment.

For months, Britain's *Daily Mail* has published a string of health care horror stories about citizens who died from neglect in NHS hospitals or while waiting for much-needed surgery. What once was touted as the best health care system in the world is an increasingly creaky bureaucracy delivering Third World care.

After putting off the problem, the prime minister and his chancellor have announced they are now prepared to pour money into this failed system—and raise taxes to fund it.

The money may help pay off some hospital trust debt, but it won't provide better health care for the average citizen. For all his talk about "systemic reform" Blair remains rigidly opposed to opening the health service to some market forces and private provider competition that could improve service.

Indeed, Blair is so committed to preserving the NHS's socialist roots, he is unwilling to adopt even the relatively modest market mechanisms now found in the Swedish, German, or Dutch health care systems. Instead, the NHS continues to ration care indiscriminately and keeps proven drugs off the market that it simply doesn't want to pay for.

The result is a system that promises to continue providing Britons with substandard health care and indefensible waiting lists for the foreseeable future. It has enraged even those once prepared to give Blair the benefit of the doubt. Writing in the *Sunday Telegraph* earlier this month, Stephen Pollard, a Labour man and erstwhile Blair confidant, offered a stunning indictment of the prime minister's refusal to make needed changes to the National Health Service: "Not only has he wasted nearly five years in which he could have reformed health care," wrote Pollard, "it is obvious from every conversation that I have ever had with him that, even if he stays in office for another five years, nothing is going to change."

Ironically, it is what Blair has taken from British politics rather than his contributions to it that may prove to be his real legacy.

Since moving to Downing Street, the prime minister has steadily diminished the role of the House of Commons, suppressing the tradition of spirited parliamentary debate and dissent. Under his leadership there has been a conscious effort to shift power away from Westminster Palace and create a quasi-executive branch housed at No. 10—one that, unlike

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Reuters / Gary Henderson

the American version, operates with few checks and balances.

Such a system fits the Blair model comfortably. He has consistently preferred press conferences to parliamentary speeches. With a large majority to enact his agenda, parliamentary sessions are treated as a stuffy nuisance. His own Labour backbenchers have accused him of deploying parliamentary "thugs" to suppress dissent.

Earlier this month, the question of parliamentary integrity was on the front page again when Elizabeth Filkin, the Commons' commissioner hired to investigate improprieties among the members, announced she would not be returning for another term. In a stinging departure letter to the speaker, she accused the government of employing a whisper campaign to stymie her investigations. Blair shrugged off Tory suggestions for an inquiry into her claims.

The more cynical voices in the British press (and among the Conservative opposition) have suggested that Blair eagerly rushed to Bush's side and onto the international stage after September 11 because it offered him respite from his own unproductive domestic situation.

Americans need not take such a jaundiced view of his actions. No other foreign leader—not Schröder, not Chirac, not Chrétien, not Vincente Fox—has provided such unflinching support during our national crisis. Blair's willingness to stand by us will make him an admired figure in the United States long after he leaves office.

But in admiring Blair's foreign policy courage, we should learn what we can from his well-documented failings as a domestic political leader. Under Blair, as under Clinton, the Third Way has proven to be a sham. While Blair has freely borrowed the language of individual responsibility and limited government from conservative and centrist think tanks, as party leader he has not taken the bold steps needed to tackle Britain's most stubborn domestic problems. While it can be plausibly argued that he has successfully restrained the left-wing excesses of his party, he has never been willing to expend political capital to deliver the centrist results with which he so publicly associates himself.

So the last model Bush should emulate is Blair. The successful prosecution of the war in Afghanistan has given the president the popular support that the Florida election debacle denied him. At the time of his inauguration, disenchanted Democrats and Washington columnists argued that the new president had no choice but to chart a new, less divisive politics aimed toward the much-celebrated center. Bush stubbornly ignored them and stuck to the pursuit of tax cuts, faith-based charities, and school testing.

Now, in a different political environment, Bush continues to resist calls to postpone his agenda and embrace someone else's. His announcement of U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty was a model of the resolve he will need to show domestically. Instead of the triangulation invented by Dick Morris and refined by Blair, Bush ought to stick to the simple, if contentious, ideas he laid out during his campaign and at the outset of his administration: tax cuts, market-driven Medicare reform, personal Social Security accounts, restructured immigration policies, and free trade.

Such an agenda doesn't lend itself to soothing dulcet tones of superficial bipartisanship. But as Tony Blair has demonstrated, comforting talk about a new type of politics yields few real achievements. Blair's wartime support deserves our applause; his domestic policy agenda does not. ♦

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Scamtrak

Will Congress keep bailing out a failing railroad? BY STEPHEN MOORE

IF YOU THOUGHT the $15 billion airline bailout bill was a bloated corporate welfare handout, wait till you see what Congress has planned for Amtrak. In the wake of September 11, with the airlines in precarious financial condition, the government-operated passenger rail service is now regarded on Capitol Hill as more vital than ever. Amtrak management has rushed a 10-year, $70 billion bailout request to Congress. That's about as much money as it took to put a man on the moon. Despite the ludicrous price tag, House Transportation Committee chairman Don Young, the Alaska Republican, has already given the rail loan scheme a thumbs up.

Democrats, meanwhile, are even more eager to throw money at Amtrak—and its 26,000 union workers. The Senate Democrats' original bill included $9 billion in immediate emergency loans to Amtrak. This would be the largest single infusion of federal funds ever to Amtrak. If you're wondering how this money found its way into an economic stimulus plan, well, it's no more preposterous than the $220 million earmarked for pumpkin growers, cauliflower producers, and bison ranchers that Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle has sought.

Amtrak's friends and foes alike agree that the train service is in horrid financial shape. Even though ridership is up 15 percent since September 11, Amtrak is burning money faster than ever. For every dollar it collects in ticket fares, it incurs almost $2 in costs. Earlier this month, Amtrak's independent oversight council declared that at its current rate of losses the railroad will be insolvent by late next year. To avoid Chapter 11, Amtrak will need an additional $280 million in operating subsidies from taxpayers in 2002, which is a mere fraction of the estimated $10 to $20 billion Amtrak needs to modernize its trains and tracks.

Things weren't supposed to turn out this way. Five years ago, congressional Republicans commanded Amtrak management to wean themselves off taxpayer subsidies. Under the gun, Amtrak supporters promised that the rail service would break even by 2002. At the time, this plan seemed to have a plausible chance of succeeding.

No more. Amtrak's latest round of financial woes proves that the railroad's financial independence plan is a hopeless sham. For at least five years, Amtrak officials have doctored the books by delaying billions of dollars of capital expenditures to pay their mushrooming operating costs. What is doubly infuriating is that in the new, post-September 11 environment of extravagant, industry-wide bailouts, loans, and insurance subsidies, Amtrak's supporters no longer even bother pretending that the railroad will ever be able to roll on its own four wheels. Congress has arrived at a crossroads with Amtrak: Come up with a rational plan to cut Amtrak loose once and for all, or commit to a future of roughly $2 billion in annual taxpayer subsidies from now until kingdom come.

What seems clear from this latest financial mess is that costs will continue to soar as long as the government owns Amtrak. Thanks to layer upon layer of duplicative management and an inability to fire unproductive workers, Amtrak's employee productivity rates are only about one-fifth the level of the airlines (who are notorious for their own lack of productivity).

Another problem is that political considerations prevent some of Amtrak's most hopelessly unprofitable routes from being shut down. Many long distance trips (New York to Los Angeles, for example) carry a $500 per passenger subsidy. Over the past decade, every time an Amtrak passenger has boarded a train, it has cost taxpayers between $50 and $100.

Amtrak's latest scheme is to bet the house on high-speed rail service, which it hopes will entice millions of Americans back on board trains. But so far, high-speed rail appears to be merely the transportation equivalent of recent taxpayer-subsidized sports stadium boondoggles. One of the country's foremost experts on high-speed rail is Andrew Selden, vice president for law and policy at the United Rail Passenger Alliance, a group that supports rail service but believes Amtrak is crippled by management stupidity. Selden provides compelling evidence that high-speed rail, rather than being Amtrak's fiscal salvation, is turning out to be a financial black hole, particularly along the Northeast corridor.

The new high-speed Acela locomotives cost $3 billion for the trains themselves and will cost another $7 billion for track improvements. The premise of the Acela is that speedier trains (they travel up to 200 miles per hour) will divert people away from cars and airplane shuttles and onto the trains. "That simply hasn't happened," explains Selden. "For travelers commuting from Washington, D.C., to New York, high-speed trains save only 15 minutes off the Metroliner's 3-hour travel time." That time-saving is not inconsequential. But few people have been willing to pay higher ticket prices to save 15 minutes. Before September 11, the high-speed trains were running at about one-third of capacity. (Even with the post-September 11 bounce in ridership, only about half the seats are occupied.) The aging business-class Metroliners were already below 50 percent capacity even before Acela was launched. "There was never any evidence to suggest that somehow

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doubling the Amtrak carrying capacity in the Northeast was going to lead to anything but emptier trains," complains Selden.

That brings us to the core policy issue at stake here: Are there public benefits from Amtrak that justify $2 billion a year in subsidies? When you pose this question to Amtrak management, passenger groups, or the rail unions, you hear three justifications for federal assistance: First, the railroad is a vital component of our national infrastructure and system of inter-city transportation; second, Amtrak benefits the nation through reduced traffic congestion, less pollution, and lower dependence on imported oil; and third, Amtrak's competitors—bus and airline service—are heavily subsidized themselves.

But these arguments don't withstand scrutiny. Amtrak's ridership volume is too low for it to have more than a negligible impact on road congestion, pollution levels, or dependence on foreign oil. According to Census Bureau data, more people walk to work each day than take the train. It would make more sense to subsidize Reebok sneakers than rail service.

As for the long distance train routes, they carry about 5.5 million passengers a year. Ron Utt, an economic research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, calculates that this is roughly the number of people who travel out of just a single medium-size airport every year. Southwest Airlines alone has more than 10 million passengers annually. Unsubsidized inter-city buses carry 700 million passengers a year, and those passengers tend to have a much lower income than the taxpayer-aided Amtrak travelers. And except for the Northeast corridor route, which runs from Boston through New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, and some local routes in California, Amtrak is not a vital means of inter-city transportation.

The third argument—that Amtrak only wants a level playing field with its competitors—isn't persuasive either. True, the airlines made out like bandits with their bailout package in September. Nonetheless, per passenger-mile traveled, Amtrak subsidies are still at least 10 times higher than what buses and airline companies get. The latest Amtrak bailout proposal would almost double the per-rider handout, sloping the playing field even more steeply in rail's favor.

But all of these arguments may be immaterial because of an underlying political reality: The American public has a deeply nostalgic attachment to trains. Trains represent a romantic, bygone era, when train travel was posh and entertaining and the primary means of getting from one city to another. In short, Americans don't want trains to disappear—even though few people actually ride them. Those families who do ride the trains like the idea of taxpayers kicking in half the travel expenses for their vacations. And if the voters don't want rail service to come to an end, you can bet that Congress won't let it happen.

Per passenger mile traveled, Amtrak subsidies are still at least 10 times higher than what buses and airline companies get.

The good news is that even many rail enthusiasts, like the folks at the United Rail Passenger Alliance, now acknowledge that the existing federal monopoly structure of Amtrak is killing passenger rail service. Thirty years of federal ownership has made train service shoddy, undependable, and expensive. There's no immutable law of economics which dictates that train service must lose money; other nations, including Japan and New Zealand, have proven that privatized rail service can work much more efficiently than state ownership.

One alternative to another expensive bailout is to do what Andrew Selden favors: Break up the Amtrak system into discrete, independently operated lines. Under this plan, the long distance trains—which are used by tourists, not business travelers—could become self-sustaining private operations by exploiting the same network-effect efficiencies of flow and scale that the airlines have used so successfully with their "fortress hubs."

Under this plan, the government would still own and maintain the tracks and the rest of the physical infrastructure, just as it builds and repairs roads. But operational costs would be covered by private for-profit railroad entities. Once established, we could unleash all these entities to compete—something American passenger rail service hasn't seen since the 1960s. The key is to allow the forces of competition and the profit motive to drive efficiency, innovation, increased output, and customer satisfaction in ways that monopolies are constitutionally incapable of achieving.

Congress should immediately lift the monopoly protection of Amtrak, which prohibits private operators from running rail service on government tracks. This never made any sense. Amtrak says it needs this protection to keep out competitors who might "skim the cream" and take away passengers on the most profitable routes. But since none of its routes makes money, Amtrak has no cream to skim. Private operators could demonstrate that passenger rail service, if operated efficiently, can indeed make money.

Admittedly, it's uncertain whether this privatization reform option, which would provide reasonable federal subsidies of the infrastructure, can save passenger rail service. But the alternative—continued government monopoly mismanagement of trains, and another $30 to $40 billion in taxpayer aid over the next 20 years—is even more unattractive. For 30 years, Amtrak has promised that profitability was right around the corner. Congress should now demand that Amtrak turn that corner. ♦

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What's On The Minds of America's Leading Conservatives?

Popular conservative authors pictured (left to right) Alan Keyes, G. Gordon Liddy, Robert Bork, Ann Coulter, Robert Novak, Thomas Sowell, William F. Buckley, William J. Bennett

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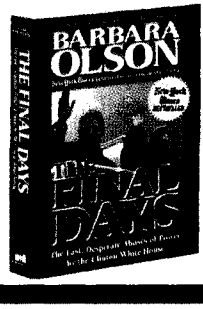

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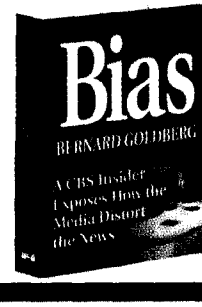

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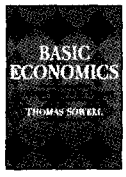

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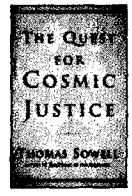

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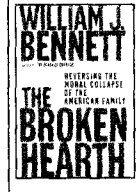

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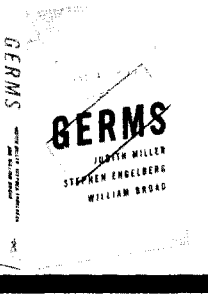

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The Majority Leader's War

Tom Daschle's strategy for defeating George W. Bush.

By Fred Barnes

President Bush was in a pleading mood. The occasion was his weekly White House breakfast with congressional leaders. His remarks were pointed at Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle. Please don't load up the defense appropriations bill with billions of extra spending for "homeland security," as Sen. Robert Byrd of West Virginia was proposing. I'll have to veto it, Bush said. He said that three times. These were the strongest words Bush has uttered at any of the breakfasts.

Around that time—late November—Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld briefed all 100 senators on the course of the war on terrorism at a closed-door meeting at the Capitol. "How can we help you?" a senator asked. Don't lard the defense bill with "pork," Rumsfeld answered. That brought groans from the audience of senators.

Daschle may have been one of those groaning. In any event, he didn't honor Rumsfeld's (and Bush's) request. Bush's insistence that more than enough had already been appropriated was ignored. So was his appeal for the Senate to wait until Tom Ridge puts together a homeland security plan early next year. Byrd, unrestrained, went ahead, devoting two weeks to pushing for more spending. First he wanted $20 billion, then $15 billion, then it was cut to $7.5 billion before returning to $15 billion. In the end, Byrd and Democrats got zero as Senate Republicans blocked the added spending on procedural grounds.

The episode was illuminating about how Daschle functions as wartime majority leader. He takes a minimalist approach. He has lavish praise ("spectacular," "great") for Bush's performance in the war on terrorism and he's strongly backed Bush's war agenda. He delivered quick Senate approval of the counterterrorism bill, "use of force" resolution, $40 billion supplemental appropriation, airline bailout, and aviation security bill. "The president and I have worked as closely together as I've worked with anybody over the last several years," Daschle said on *Meet the Press*. "We've done all of those pieces the Bush administration has indicated were important to this country and the agenda in the aftermath of September 11."

Not quite. Daschle feels obligated to work with Bush only on matters *directly* connected to the war effort. How about on matters Bush says are war-related but many Democrats claim aren't sufficiently related? That's another story. On these—the energy bill, say, or terrorism insurance—Daschle is anything but bipartisan. In fact, he has fiercely opposed Bush and has prevented other Democrats from pursuing bipartisan agreements. And instead of bringing up legislation sought by Bush for a vote before adjourning this week, Daschle substituted the railroad retirement and farm bills. Neither is time sensitive, but both are important to Democratic constituencies.

Since September 11, Daschle has intervened to upset bipartisan cooperation on the energy, terrorism insurance, and economic stimulus bills. Bush says the energy measure, and especially its provision for oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), is critical to national security. "The less dependent we are on foreign sources of crude oil, the more secure we are at home," the president declared. Yet when at least two Democrats—Senators Daniel Akaka of Hawaii and Mary Landrieu of Louisiana—were prepared to back ANWR drilling, Daschle removed the bill from the energy committee and took personal charge of it. His excuse was that the bill was divisive and would prompt a time-consuming filibuster. Of course the bill is also the bane of the environmental lobby, a Democratic constituency bent on protecting ANWR from oil companies.

On terrorism insurance, a deal had been negotiated by Democrats Paul Sarbanes of Maryland, the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, and Chris Dodd of Connecticut, and Republican Phil Gramm of Texas. Daschle annulled their agreement because it barred punitive damages in lawsuits involving acts of terrorism—damages taxpayers might ultimately have to pay. Limits on damages

Fred Barnes is executive editor of The Weekly Standard.

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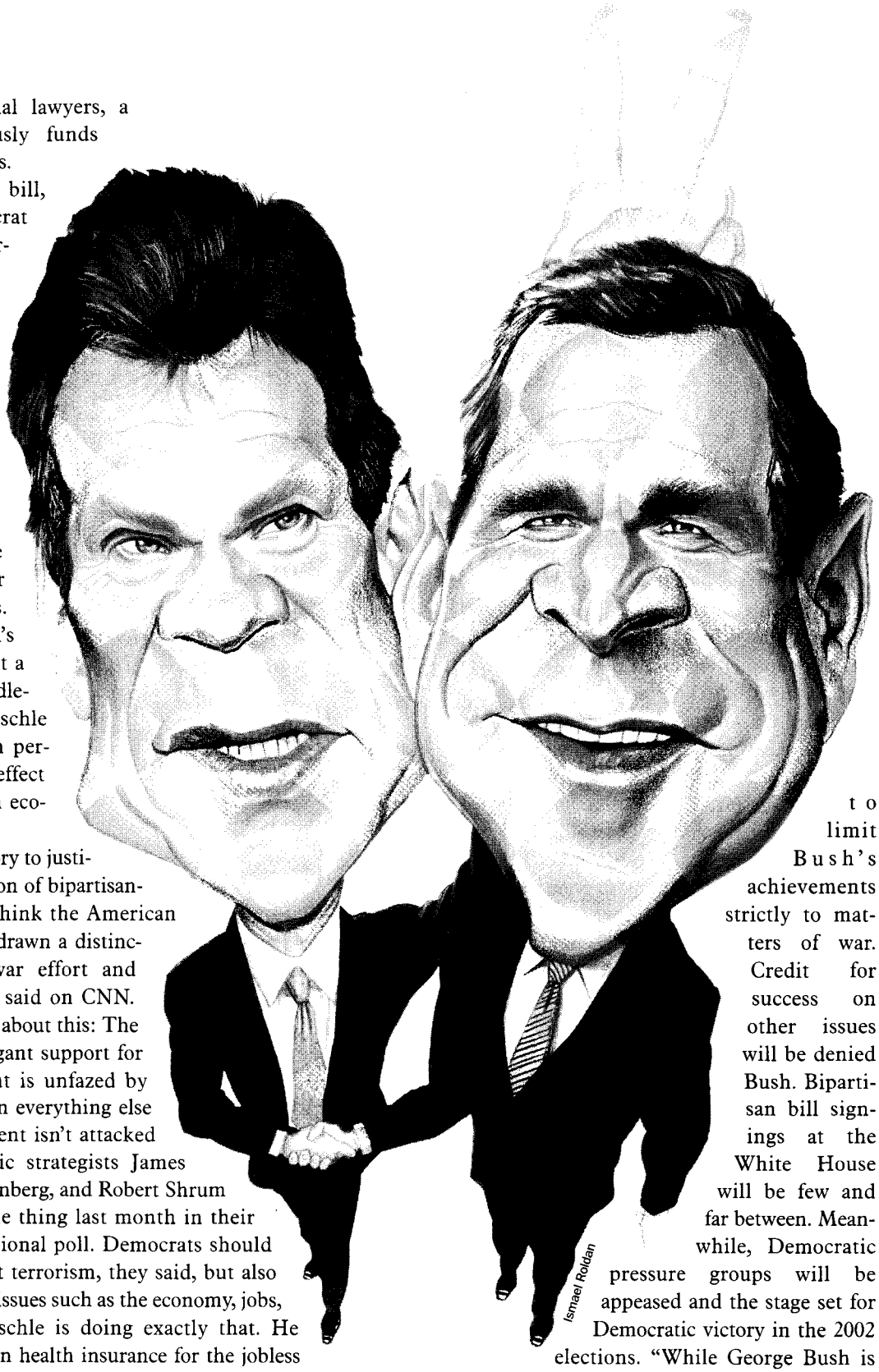
are anathema to trial lawyers, a group that generously funds Democratic candidates.

On the stimulus bill, Daschle kept Democrat Max Baucus, the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, from drafting legislation with Republican input. Not surprisingly, the resulting bill left off Bush's top priority for juicing the economy, acceleration of income tax rate reductions slated over the next five years. And despite Bush's willingness to restrict a rate reduction to middle-class taxpayers, Daschle objects to any cut in personal rates at all, in effect blocking a bipartisan economic stimulus.



Daschle has a theory to justify his narrow definition of bipartisanship in wartime. "I think the American people have actually drawn a distinction between the war effort and domestic policy," he said on CNN. No doubt he's correct about this: The public wants extravagant support for Bush on the war, but is unfazed by opposition to Bush on everything else so long as the president isn't attacked by name. Democratic strategists James Carville, Stanley Greenberg, and Robert Shrum said roughly the same thing last month in their analysis of a new national poll. Democrats should back the fight against terrorism, they said, but also lay claim to domestic issues such as the economy, jobs, and health care. Daschle is doing exactly that. He insists, for example, on health insurance for the jobless as part of a stimulus package, thus keeping the health care issue alive.

How should we regard this crass maneuvering by Daschle? It's not that he's unpatriotic or that his actions are indefensible. It's that he's intensely partisan wherever and whenever possible, even in wartime. Daschle's aim is to limit Bush's achievements strictly to matters of war. Credit for success on other issues will be denied Bush. Bipartisan bill signings at the White House will be few and far between. Meanwhile, Democratic pressure groups will be appeased and the stage set for Democratic victory in the 2002 elections. "While George Bush is popular, voter doubts are close to the surface," Carville, Greenberg, and Shrum said. "We should not give voice to these doubts in this period, but we should be prepared to highlight issues that allow those doubts to emerge later." This sounds like Daschle's marching orders, though he says he hasn't read the strategists' analysis.

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For a month now, Republicans have gone after Daschle, charging him with obstructionism. The attacks started with conservative groups and Republicans in Congress. More recently, White House aides Larry Lindsey and Karen Hughes and Vice President Dick Cheney have joined in. Daschle, Cheney told Tim Russert on *Meet the Press*, "has decided . . . to become more of an obstructionist." Hughes told a group of Gannett reporters that Daschle has created a "void of leadership" in the Senate. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, Daschle's most persistent GOP critic in the Senate, says Daschle has single-handedly destroyed the "air of bipartisanship" in Congress.

The attacks appear to have damaged Daschle not at all. On the contrary, they've made his standing among Democrats higher than ever, and it was pretty high to begin with. The public doesn't seem to have taken much notice. A telltale sign is that one of Daschle's chief aides, Anita Dunn, offers anyone who's interested an updated compilation of all Republican charges from the press, TV, or television ads. The most striking is a TV spot accusing Daschle of aiding Saddam Hussein by blocking oil drilling in ANWR. The ad is not entirely frivolous: ANWR would produce the same amount of oil the United States currently imports from Iraq.

Daschle is busy obstructing, not pushing legislation. His problem isn't Republican leaders. It's fellow Democratic senator Robert Byrd.

The question is why has the anti-Daschle campaign failed so miserably? Daschle, after all, *is* an obstructionist and none-too-secretive about it. My explanation is twofold. First, there's his appealing manner. He's calm, soft-spoken, and easygoing. If there's a particular style that folks expect in a clever political operator, Daschle hasn't got it. Sure, looks can be deceiving. In Daschle's case, they are.

Second, there's the adoring press corps. You have to look long and hard to find a piece, on TV or in print, that's hostile to Daschle. Nowhere in the media, for example, has anyone raised the competence issue—that is, why doesn't Daschle get legislation passed. A majority leader normally is judged by the standard of what he produces, not by what he impedes. Yet legislation approved in the House with its 5-vote Republican majority piles up in the Senate and the press looks the other way. There's trade promotion authority, the faith-based initiative, a ban on cloning, election reform, and the passel of war-related bills waiting for Senate deliberation, and waiting and waiting and waiting. Just last week the White House was informed faith-based won't be taken up this year, as Daschle had earlier promised the president.

Remember when Trent Lott was majority leader and he tried to slip some small measure helping Mississippi into a bill? The press always landed on him. Daschle managed to get an item in the defense appropriations bill that turns an old gold mine over to the state of South Dakota but assigns any legal liability growing out of the mine's cleanup to the federal government, aka the taxpayers. Daschle had to plead with GOP senator John McCain not to attack the measure as pork. McCain didn't, and the press didn't either.

At the moment, Daschle's problem isn't Republican leaders. They can usually muster enough votes to block any Daschle initiative by filibuster. But that's not particularly meaningful these days since Daschle is busy obstructing, not pushing legislation. His problem is Democratic senator Robert Byrd. Daschle knows that if Byrd is dominating the Senate floor with a new spending scheme, it's not good for Democrats or for Daschle himself. But the majority leader has difficulty controlling Byrd.

Byrd's bid to jack up spending for homeland security turned into a fiasco. Senate Democrats were forced to back Byrd, the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, if only for self-protection. But there was fallout. Democratic senator Dick Durbin of Illinois tried to amend the defense bill with funds for doubling the number of runways at O'Hare Airport in Chicago. The other Illinois senator, Republican Peter Fitzgerald, was opposed. Fitzgerald took the Senate floor, and kept talking when an impatient Byrd arrived with his final spending amendment. Byrd glared at Fitzgerald. Finally, Republicans informed Daschle the only way Fitzgerald would yield the floor was for Durbin to withdraw his O'Hare amendment. The result was a double defeat: Durbin caved and Byrd lost. And Daschle was unable to avert the embarrassment.

Next year Daschle may have a bigger problem still with a victorious war president. Democrats are counting on Bush's popularity to evaporate after the war just as his father's did post-Gulf War. It may not. Even many Bush voters were slightly dubious of him in 2000, but now everyone has learned more about Bush, virtually all of it favorable. Daschle has kicked most major issues into 2002, expecting Democrats will have more sway. But what if Bush, still popular, decides to use his political capital on domestic issues? Karl Rove, Bush's senior aide, has promised he will. In that event, bipartisanship may appeal to Daschle next year more than he thought it would. ♦

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Psyching Out the Taliban

The Army plans mind games at Fort Bragg.

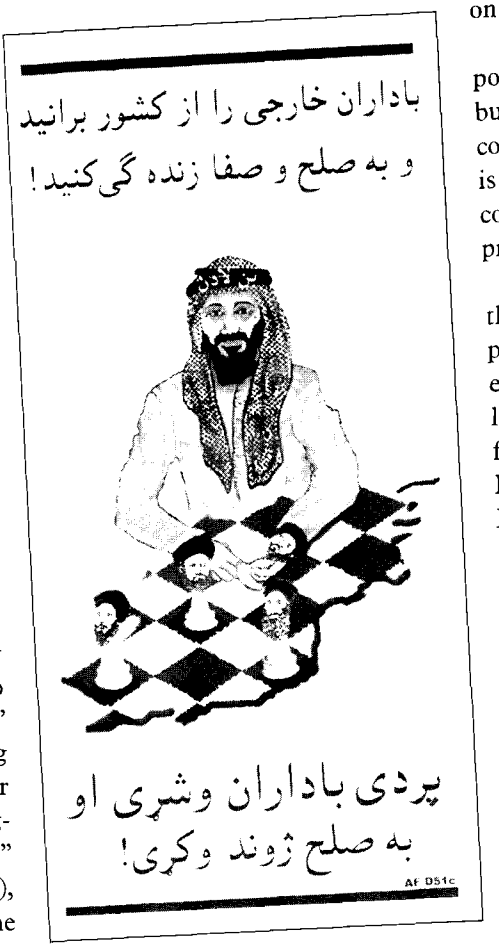
By Matt Labash

Fort Bragg, N.C.

Despite the low-rent ambiance of Bragg Blvd.—the land of Park'n'Pawns and $1.99 fried chicken plates—Fort Bragg has always been synonymous with the Army's elite. Arriving at the home of the 82nd Airborne and Special Forces, visitors often experience the contact-buzz that comes from occupying the same ground as the Green Berets and Delta Force. But in a complex of ugly low-slung buildings resides another group of warriors, these mostly unsung—the soldiers and civilians of the 4th Psychological Operations Group.

After American bombs and Northern Alliance fighters, perhaps no one has had a greater effect on the rapid demise of the Taliban than the Army's psychological operations (PSYOPs) team. But you wouldn't know it from the way they act. Calling themselves "force multipliers" who deal in "perceptions management," they don't even have a blood-curdling nickname like the "Night Stalkers" or "Snake Eaters." While some Army regulars call them the "bullshit bombers" (for their propaganda dissemination), Maj. Ric Rohm, executive officer of the 8th PSYOP battalion, when pressed for a nickname, comes up stumped: "Umm, I guess it's just 'PSYOPer.'"

If PSYOPers themselves are an understated lot, the very term "psychological operations" tends to conjure images of black-bag artists—camouflaged Freudians practiced in the dark art of winning hearts by warping minds. But operating under the regimental motto "Persuade, Change, Influence," the brass works overtime to stand a group of visiting reporters' stereotypes on end.



Despite a John Wayne *Green Berets* poster on the wall with the dialogue bubble "Better get Psywar on that," the conference room where we are briefed is littered with mission statements, corny successories—even the serenity prayer.

Over in the nearby printing plant, the air is choked with the smell of printer cleaning solvent, as the presses have now rolled off 15 million leaflets that have been dropped in fiberglass bombs over Afghanistan. Here, Dr. David Champagne, the 4th PSYOP Group's civilian Afghanistan expert, who says he fell in love with the country as a Peace Corps "hippie," translates the latest effort: a leaflet wishing Afghans "Happy Eid" (the feast in which Muslims break their Ramadan fast). "We want them to know that we care about them as human beings," says Champagne. "They probably haven't had many happy greetings for the last six years."

With all this peace'n'love, a naive civilian—convincingly played by yours truly—might start suspecting that the real psychological operation is the one the 4th PSYOP Group is performing on the press. When my public affairs escort tells me that everything they put out has to be truthful, I finally snap: "Who cares if it is? This is war." ("Hey, I

Matt Labash is senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

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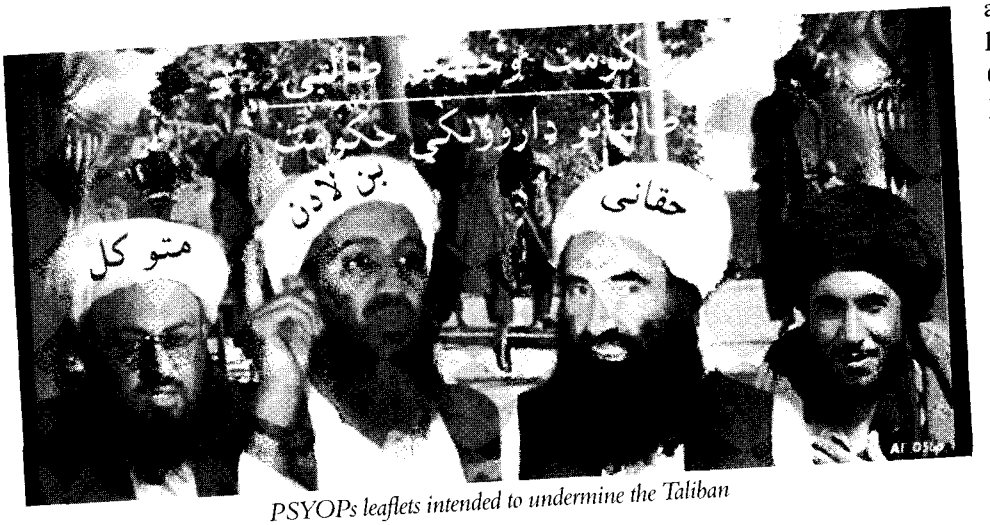
don't make the rules," he counters.) But my initial reaction is a poorly informed one. As Col. James Treadwell, the 4th PSYOP Group commander, says, "Truth is the best propaganda. If you ever get caught in a lie, you lose your credibility. That doesn't mean we have to tell the whole truth. I guess that's one difference between public affairs and psychological operations."

Obviously Col. Treadwell has never sat through a Pentagon briefing. But he's wise to uphold this time-honored propaganda tenet. PSYOPers, after all, are in the perception business. For this reason, 9th PSYOP battalion commander Lt. Col. Glenn Ayers goes so far as to say, "I do not like that 'P' word. Propaganda elicits the vision of Goebbels, who used it for nefarious reasons." Though military historian Daniel Lerner has written that the mark of a first-rate propagandist is one who "conceals his skill from the public" appearing to be "a simple man, telling the simple truth," Joseph Goebbels had no appetite for subtlety. He gave the game away with his title, "Minister of Propaganda."



PSYOPs leaflets intended to undermine the Taliban

With as brutal a regime as the Taliban, of course, there is no need to shade the truth. Consequently, American propaganda, in the form of leaflets and radio broadcasts beamed in from the EC-130 Commando Solo aircraft (television's not an option—since the Taliban destroyed everyone's sets), has come in four varieties:

• Informational—giving listings of American radio broadcasts, and cautioning civilians to stay clear of humanitarian food drops, since nothing spoils goodwill like killing someone with a crate of peanut butter.

• The Friendly Neighbor—smiling American family shakes hands with smiling Afghan family.

• Appeals to the Taliban Swing Voter: One leaflet shows Mullah Omar as a dog whose leash is held by Osama bin Laden, while another shows fleeing Taliban fighters running from an incinerated truck with the gentle admonition "Stop fighting for the Taliban and live."

• Sugar Daddy Appeals: $25 million to whoever assists in bin Laden's capture.

While it may sound simple, it's not. Churning out these materials involves a 17-step process from conception to dissemination. Themes are not only thoroughly researched and vetted among the 4th PSYOP Group's 1,200 soldiers and 35 civilian analysts, but the final product has to be approved by the U.S. Central Command chief. While PSYOPers say they are part ad men, part ethnographers (all of them are proficient in at least one foreign language), Army doctrine requires that they also be everything from Strunk & White imitators ("the propaganda writer must be brief, summarizing the theme by using short, forceful words") to Mary Kay consultants ("Colors may be used to harmonize with the moods of the illustrations. . . . Red may be used to suggest violence, blue or green for peaceful scenes, and black or white for death").

And like good ad men, they focus-group everything, pre-testing and post-testing materials with natives, refugees, or prisoners of war. Failing to focus-group a message might cause them to miss important cultural nuances, which can jeopardize credibility, cause a piece to fall flat, or even worse, insult the audience that it is intended to persuade.

A few years ago, Lt. Col. Ayers was overseeing a landmine awareness program in Cambodia. Ayers figured it

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was a fail-safe campaign, since "no one out there wants to step on a landmine." But he pre-tested a T-shirt anyway, one which depicted a boy squatting over a mine that he was poking with a stick. "In our mind's eye, it said 'don't poke a landmine with a stick,'" says Ayers. "But when we tested it, the Khmer villagers said, 'Why do you have this person defecating over a landmine?' The kid was in a position that they typically use for a bowel movement. We had to pull the boy back a little bit and make changes based upon what we found."

Such attention to detail has earned American PSYOPers a reputation as the modern era's finest propagandists, which is saying something, since psychological warfare is as old as war itself. As long ago as 500 B.C., the Persians exploited the Egyptians' sacred regard for cats, paralyzing them by unleashing hundreds of panic-stricken felines on the battlefield. (The Persians claimed victory without suffering any casualties.)

But after reviewing former PSYOPer Ed Rouse's *psywarrior.com* (the web's most definitive repository of psychological operations history), it becomes apparent that all propagandists are not created equal. The United States has rarely resorted to sexual themes, though some reports have it that covert operatives left foot-long condoms on the Ho Chi Minh trail, presumably causing NVA soldiers to hide their women as well as themselves. Other countries, however, have been less circumspect, often stumbling into embarrassing gaffes.

During World War II, the Japanese leafleted American forces, trying to demoralize the enemy with the hardy perennial: Your girl is getting mounted by the strapping buck back home. To illustrate this theme, however, the Japanese used graphic pornography—a relative scarcity on the frontlines. The effect, says military historian Stanley Sandler: "It did the opposite of what it was supposed to. It raised morale. Our guys loved it. They'd trade them like baseball cards—five for a bottle of whisky."

In Iraq during the Gulf War, America ran a textbook PSYOP campaign, not only scaring the tar out of Iraqis by truthfully advertising when our B-52s would next bomb specific positions (causing mass surrenders), but also by running brilliant deception maneuvers (floating leaflets in bottles ashore in Kuwait to suggest an impending amphibious invasion that never came). Iraq countered pathetically with radio propagandist Baghdad Betty, the Gulf War equivalent of Tokyo Rose, who tried to break the enemy's morale by telling Americans that their wives and girlfriends were getting snatched up by Tom Cruise, Tom Selleck, and Bart Simpson.

While it's difficult to quantify PSYOP success, Sun Tzu, whom many consider the original PSYOPer, wrote that "To capture the enemy's entire army is better than to destroy it. . . . For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence."

Score is often kept in conventional warfare by tallying how many are killed, but in some measure, PSYOP success is based on how many are allowed to live. In Iraq, Rouse writes, nearly 87,000 Iraqi soldiers turned themselves over to coalition forces, and many of them were clutching American leaflets, which offered "safe conduct passes." During Vietnam, which wasn't even our best PSYOP effort because of organizational problems and stateside dissent, it was still estimated that the average cost of killing one Viet Cong guerrilla was $400,000 (the price of artillery shells, cluster bombs, etc.), while the average cost of causing one Viet Cong defection was only $125.

The 4th PSYOP Group has yet to post-test its products with Afghans to see if they effectively employed "logic, fear, desire or other mental factors to promote specific emotions, attitudes or behaviors" (as the press release objectives state). But one is tempted to chalk the group's efforts up as successful. After all, in what other conflict have we so readily subdued the enemy? Then again, we have dropped over 12,000 bombs on Afghanistan since October 7. When it comes to modifying emotions, attitudes, and behavior, those tend to work wonders too. ♦

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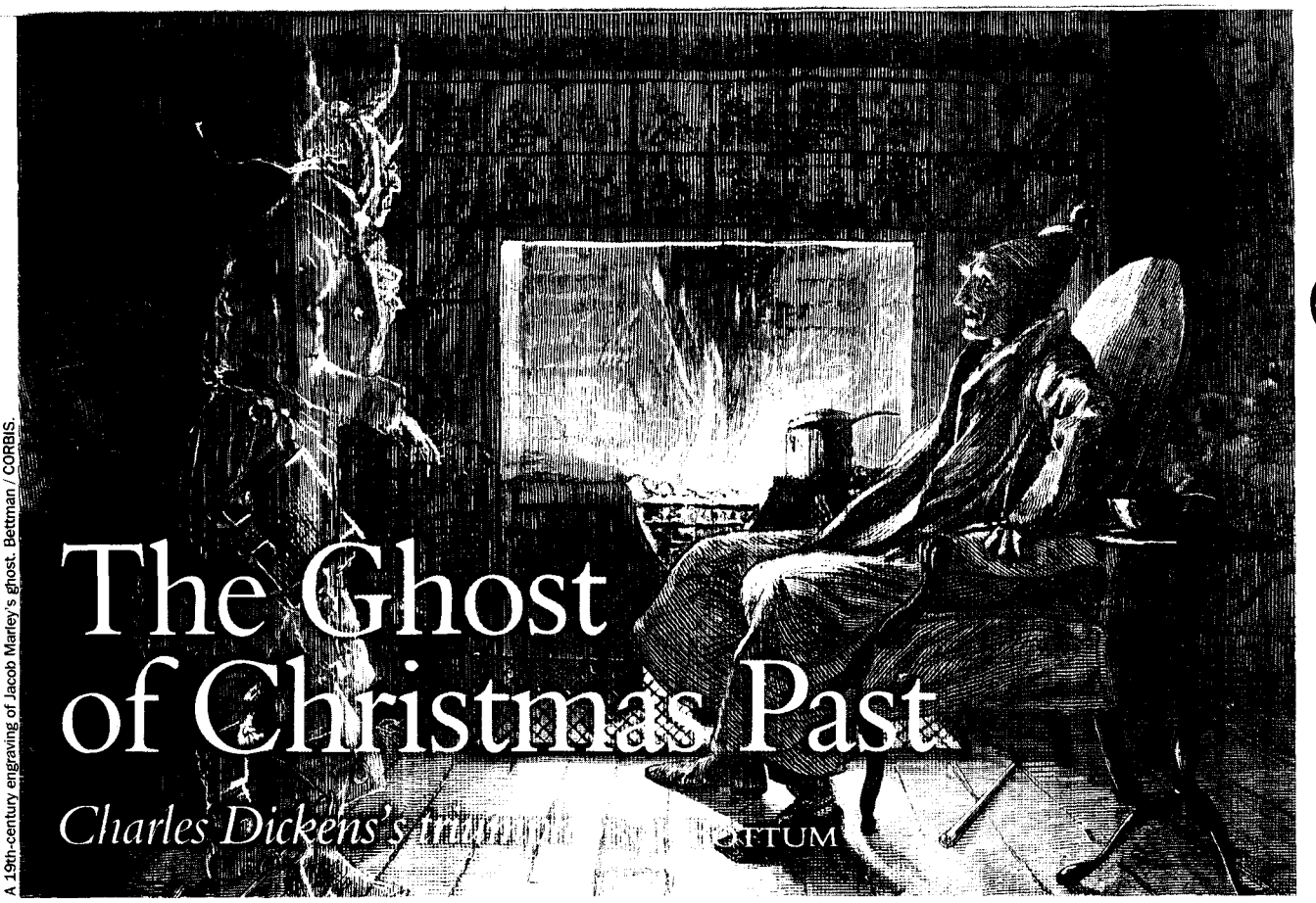

A 19th-century engraving of Jacob Marley's ghost. Bettman / CORBIS.

The Ghost of Christmas Past

Charles Dickens's [illegible] BOTTUM

It's almost impossible not to know how it opens. "Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that." Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* has been filmed at least forty-two times and dramatized for the stage in over thirty different versions—the first within days of the book's publication in 1843, a pirated play that Dickens spent £700 in court costs fighting before he won an uncollectable judgment against its producers (and thereby found the material for the great Chancery case of *Jarndyce* v. *Jarndyce* that lies at the center of *Bleak House*, but that's another story). "Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail," the famous first paragraph of *A Christmas Carol* ends.

But who remembers how the second paragraph runs? "Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail."

You don't get much of that narrator's voice in the films we've all seen, over and over, every Christmas—with Alastair Sim in the 1951 version, or George C. Scott in the 1984 version, or Mr. Magoo in the 1962 cartoon, for that matter. You don't get the wordiness: "I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly." You don't get the facetiousness: "my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for." You don't get the hallucinogenic animation of inanimate objects. You don't get the comedy running over and under the sentimentality. You don't get the manic speed, or the almost insane energy, or the sheer delight in writing down words. You may get the story and the characters—but you don't get Dickens.

And as for the story and characters, they are, on their face, a mess. Of course, we don't demand much real coherence from the tale, which is in itself a revealing fact about the success of Dickens's art. His friend, unofficial agent, and biographer, John Forster, claimed that Dickens took a "secret delight" in giving "a higher form" to nursery stories, and the fairy-tale quality is one of the things the reader feels immediately in *A Christmas Carol*. You'd no more complain of its creaky plot than you'd stop to demand greater structural integrity from *Rumpelstiltskin*.

But the story isn't exactly what anyone would call tight. After talking to Marley's ghost until "past two" in the morning, Scrooge "went straight to bed, without undressing," only to awake to meet the Ghost of Christmas Past at midnight—two hours before he fell asleep and "clad but slightly in his slippers, dressing-gown, and nightcap."

Well, as the reformed Scrooge says on Christmas morning, "The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can." But this does seem rather pushing it. One feels pedantic objecting to the illogic of ghosts, but in *A Christmas Carol* they behave more inconsistently than even ghosts deserve. Apparently nothing the poor Ghost of Christmas Future shows Scrooge comes true. "I see a vacant seat," the Ghost reports, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully pre-

J. Bottum is Books & Arts editor of The Weekly Standard.

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served"—but at the story's end, after Scrooge's reformation, we are assured that Tiny Tim "did not die." The new Scrooge presumably meets his own death not alone—his very shirt and bed curtains stolen from around his corpse—but surrounded by his adoring nephew Fred, Fred's wife, her plump sister, Bob Cratchit, and Tiny Tim, to whom he becomes "a second father."

So, too, nothing that the Ghost of Christmas Present shows to the old miser comes true. The guests at Fred's Christmas party won't make fun of Scrooge, because Scrooge will be there. The Cratchits won't have their little goose, "eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes." They'll have instead the enormous "prize turkey" Scrooge has sent: "He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped 'em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax."

John Sutherland, the hilarious solver of minor literary problems in such books as *Was Heathcliff a Murderer?* and *Who Betrays Elizabeth Bennett?*, has a funny little note about the problems the family faced roasting that turkey. No wonder Bob Cratchit was a "full eighteen minutes and a half, behind his time" at work the next morning. The damned thing couldn't have been fully cooked until midnight. And didn't the Cratchits wonder where their meal had come from? For that matter, what is the poultry shop doing "half open" at six on Christmas morning—and why hasn't the poulterer already sold his prize bird, which, intended for a Christmas feast, is going to go bad in very short order?

Meanwhile, the characters are as unconvincing as the plot. The critic Edmund Wilson once suggested that the solution to the main figure's psychology lay in recognizing that Scrooge was a deeply divided man who would shortly revert to his miserliness. But even to speak of "Scrooge's psychology" is to miss the point—like demanding to see character development in Little Red Riding Hood and the big, bad wolf.

And yet, neither is Scrooge simply a placeholder for a fairy tale's figure of conversion. He was probably intended to be that, but Dickens can't leave him alone. Scrooge has far too much energy, takes far too much joy in being joyless. "If I could work my will . . . every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart." "You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato," he says to Marley's ghost. "There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!" He's Ralph Nickleby and Arthur Gride, the businessman villains of *Nicholas Nickleby*, ratcheted up too far to be a mere marker of villainy—just as after his conversion, he's *Nicholas Nickleby*'s Cheeryble brothers, or Fezziwig from his own past, cranked up in absolutely insane glee: "Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it."

Dickens, c. 1852

It isn't just with Scrooge that Dickens can't leave well enough alone. He can't leave anything alone—which is exactly what makes *A Christmas Carol* a triumph: the energy, the madness, the darting from thing to thing, the extravagance invested in every moment. George Orwell spotted this in Dickens. There are perhaps seven thousand named characters in his stories, and every single one has more put in him than necessary.

Even the unnamed characters can't help becoming Dickensian. While Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Past watch old Fezziwig's party, "in came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one." Why do we have to know all this? Dickens is like some mad magician, incapable of *not* transforming each thing that happens to catch his eye. In the obituary he wrote for the *Times* when Dickens died, Anthony Trollope complained how unfair it was: Every other novelist has to bend his fiction to match reality, while reality bent itself to match Dickens; by the time he was done creating a fictional bootboy like Sam Weller or a fictional miser like Scrooge, real bootboys and misers turned themselves into Dickens's characters.

The most Dickensian moment early in *A Christmas Carol* comes when Scrooge arrives home in the evening to see Marley's face in his door-knocker: "He did pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door; and he did look cautiously behind it first, as if he half expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall." English literature has had perhaps a dozen authors who would or could have done the door-

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knocker. But only Dickens is capable of the pigtail.

Twentieth-century criticism never figured out quite what to do with Dickens. The Edwardians hated him for his sentimentality, his indulgence of the grotesque, and his desexualized "legless angels"—and also for his Victorian energy, so alien to their own ironic lethargy. There were moments when Freudian interpretation seemed to grant some real insights into literature (although, as Harold Bloom put it, one always felt that Shakespeare was a better reader of Freud than Freud was of Shakespeare). But one of the reasons Freudianism failed as a theory of interpretation is that it could never get its arms around Dickens: He didn't seem to have any psychology at all in his books—just psychological truth.

Social criticism, in its turn, tried to present Dickens as the unsystematic version of Marx and Engels, and *A Christmas Carol* as the slightly more popular version of *The Condition of the Working Classes in England in 1844*. More sensible critics managed not much better. Louis Cazamian saw little in Dickens besides a *philosophie de Noël*. Orwell knew in his bones that Dickens was an author "worth fighting for," and yet he finally had to argue against Scrooge's conversion, on the grounds that Dickens never realized the social, in addition to the personal, structure of evil.

F.R. Leavis painted himself into such a corner that he ended up insisting that *Hard Times* was Dickens's most important work. Even critics as good as Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling didn't manage it: They were too honest to deny that Dickens, like Shakespeare, was the great writer of his age—and then they went back to working on their essays about William Makepeace Thackeray and George Eliot, novelists on whom they could actually use their gifts

Curiously, postmodernism managed better, not in its multicultural aspect of race, class, and gender, but in its fascination with language—for one of the things that makes Dickens run is language. Think of the names in his fiction: Scrooge and Jarndyce and Betsy Trotwood and Oliver Twist. And think of his propensity for describing inanimate objects with the adjectives of life. It is the "higher form" of nursery stories, for Dickens doesn't bother with brooms and wardrobes magically come alive. The life and the magic are in the words. In the Cratchits' kitchen, the "potatoes, bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled." Scrooge has "a gloomy suite of rooms, in a lowering pile of building up a yard, where it had so little business to be, that one could scarcely help fancying it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and-seek with other houses, and have forgotten the way out again."

J. Leech's illustration of the Ghost of Christmas Present.

This page and previous: Hulton / Archive.

When the Ghost of Christmas Present arrives, Dickens squanders five hundred words (out of twenty-eight thousand) describing fruiter's and grocer's shops: "There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish Onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish Friars, and winking from their shelves in wanton slyness at the girls as they went by, and glanced demurely at the hung-up mistletoe. There were . . . Norfolk Biffins, squab and swarthy, setting off the yellow of the oranges and lemons, and, in the great compactness of their juicy persons, urgently entreating and beseeching to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner."

That phrase "the great compactness of their juicy persons" could be imitated if one tried. Most parodies of Dickens get no further than the Dickensian sentimentality and *philosophie*

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de Noël. But it was this sort of odd twist of language that James Joyce, with his infallible eye, seized upon when he reached Dickens in the historical parodies of English prose that make up the maternity chapter of *Ulysses*. And the truth is that Dickens's language could be peculiar; this is the man who gave English the phrase "our mutual friend," when what he meant was a shared or common friend.

What can't be imitated is the energy. The Edwardians were right about Dickens's Victorianism—except that he was a hyper-Victorian, with all the virtues and vices of his age raised to something like the platonic ideal by the enormous power of his stamina. The biographer Edgar Johnson seems wrong when he says that "Christmas has for Dickens no more than the very smallest connection with Christian theology or dogma." There's plenty of Christianity in the Christmas books, from the preface, in which Dickens claims his purpose was to write "a whimsical kind of masque" that might "awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts, never out of season in a Christian land," to the most sentimental moment in *A Christmas Carol*, in which Tiny Tim "hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see."

But the secularizing impulse is already present. Even G.K. Chesterton, normally Dickens's most consistent promoter, complained that Dickens, faced with the single event around which the world has developed the most mythology, decided to invent his own Christmas mythology. But that's because traditional Christmas mythology actually involves the Christ who will become the Savior with his death and resurrection, and Dickens always wants to avoid hard cosmological edges of Christian theology. To read *The Life of Our Lord* that Dickens wrote for his own children is to think that the key moment in Christianity is Christmas, not Easter—and the key teaching of Jesus is "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." This is a massive diminishment of what St. Paul knew was the scandal of Christianity, but it's very Victorian—a reflection of all that was advanced, generous, liberal, high-minded, and doomed in the Gladstonian vision of a modern Christian state. "English flatheads" and "little moralistic females à la George Eliot," Nietzsche called them, who thought they could preserve Christian morality without much Christian religion.

Bettmann / CORBIS

In the months before he wrote *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, Dickens's serial publication of *Martin Chuzzlewit* had not been going well, the first of his full novels to receive less than universal acclaim. His sending of young Martin and Mark Tapley off to America helped, and the book gradually "forced itself up in people's opinion." But Dickens lived on his popularity; he needed esteem, and the tepid response to *Martin Chuzzlewit* brought home to him just how tired he was. He was supporting a huge household far beyond his income, he had to act as his own promoter and copyright protector, and he had written six major novels in seven years. "It is impossible to go on working the brain to that extent for ever," he told Forster. "The very spirit of the thing, in doing it, leaves a horrible despondency behind."

So he decided, in cold, commercial calculation, that he would write a Christmas story and make the £1,000 he needed to take his family away to Italy for a long vacation. Of course, being Dickens, he couldn't leave it alone. He began *A Christmas Carol* early in October and finished it before the end of November—while, as he described it in a letter, he "wept and laughed, and wept again, and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner in the composition; and thinking whereof he walked about the black streets of London fifteen and twenty miles many a night when all sober folk had gone to bed." He forced upon his publisher expensive plates and bindings, and though the first edition's six thousand copies sold out on the very first day of publication, the initial quarter's sales brought him less than a third of the money he was hoping for.

That, too, was Dickens. As prolific an author as there has ever been, he was always living not on what he had done, but on money received for the promise of his next book. When *A Christmas Carol* was done, he "broke out like a madman," with "such dinnings, such dancings, such conjurings, such blind-man's-bluffings, such theatre-goings, such kissings-out of old years and kissings-in of new ones never took place in these parts before. . . . And if you could have seen me at the children's party at Macready's the other night . . ."

Jane Carlyle did see him at that party for the actor William Charles Macready's children. She hadn't slept well for weeks—hadn't slept at all for two nights—and she was quarreling again with her husband, Thomas Carlyle. But once there, she found herself, like everyone else, caught up in the Dickensian world. "Dickens and Forster, above all, exerted themselves

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till the perspiration was pouring down and they seemed *drunk* with their efforts," she described it in a letter.

> Only think of that excellent Dickens playing the *conjuror* for one whole hour—the *best* conjuror I ever saw. . . . Then the dancing . . . the gigantic Thackeray &c &c all capering like *Maenades*!! . . . *After supper* when we were all madder than ever with the pulling of crackers, the drinking of champagne, and the making of speeches; a universal country dance was proposed—and Forster *seizing me round the waist* whirled me into the thick of it, and *made* me dance!! like a person in the treadmill who must move forward or be crushed to death. Once I cried out, "Oh for the love of Heaven let me go! you are going to dash my brains out against the folding doors!" "Your *brains*!!" he answered, "who cares about their brains *here*? *Let them go*!"

The scene rose "to something not unlike the *rape of the Sabines*!" and then Dickens took Forster and Thackeray off to his house "'*to finish the night there*' and a *royal* night they would have of it I fancy!" But Jane Carlyle went home and slept—and slept and slept, her first healthy sleep in what felt to her like years. There's some deep reflection in that scene, an image for the age: the mad Victorian extrovert Charles Dickens, his most popular book just finished, gathering up everyone around him and infusing them like puppets with his own Christmas energy. And in it, the mad Victorian introvert Jane Carlyle at last finding rest. ♦

Green No More

The education of an environmentalist.

BY CHARLES T. RUBIN

In 1997, Bjørn Lomborg, a Danish professor of statistics and a self-professed "old left-wing Greenpeace member," came across a book by Julian Simon, one of the great critics of contemporary environmentalism.

Lomborg set up a study group with ten of his "sharpest students" to refute Simon. But it turned out "a surprisingly large" number of Simon's points "stood up to scrutiny." Lomborg became convinced that "the Litany"—the clichéd collection of beliefs that the world is subject to ever increasing environmental degradation and poised on the brink of destruction—has it wrong. Most global trends are improving and can be expected to continue improving as the world grows wealthier. Fears of environmental disaster are exaggerated and have little scientific basis. While there is no reason to think the world is already good enough, there is every reason to expect human ingenuity will continue the improving trend.

The Skeptical Environmentalist
Measuring the Real State of the World
by Bjørn Lomborg
Cambridge University Press, 540 pp., $69.95

So Lomborg sat down and produced *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, a critical examination of many of the key issues of contemporary environmentalism, which he hopes will "lead to an appreciable change in attitude about environmental problems." If we "forget our fear of imminent breakdown," we may be able to achieve a "reasonable prioritization" of the measures necessary to improve the well-being of man and nature.

Lomborg deserves the impact for which he hopes, but if past experience is any indication, he won't obtain it. You can catch a hint of that in the publicity which has swirled around *The Skeptical Environmentalist* so far—all of it less concerned with the message than with the messenger's betrayal of his old environmentalist faith.

In eighteen careful chapters, Lomborg covers most of the issues environmentalists use to foment panic. Food production is increasing, and a smaller percentage of the globe faces starvation than ever before. Life expectancy is growing in most of the world. More people are prosperous and secure. Water and air pollution trends are improving; indeed, urban air in the developed nations may be cleaner now than it has been in centuries. Our fears of chemicals are greatly exaggerated. In short, we are in a period of "unprecedented human prosperity."

But isn't this prosperity built on an orgy of consumption that sacrifices future generations? Aren't we successful only by undercutting the integrity of nature itself? Lomborg excels in dissecting such examples of the environmentalists' Litany. He demonstrates that statements like "The world is losing 109 species a day" have no basis in empirical research; indeed, the scientists most likely to put forward such claims have the least interest in doing the necessary research. Similarly, in three and a half well-crafted pages, he demolishes the idea that we are running out of room for landfill and points out the link between rising prosperity and improved air quality. Whether he is hunting down the source of claims that provoke environmental alarm or providing the context that was left out in order to heighten fears and grab headlines, Lomborg shows how to evaluate claims about environmental degradation and danger.

The Skeptical Environmentalist is particularly good at recontextualizing environmental problems—the main focus of its introductory and concluding chapters. Lomborg skillfully uncovers the source of the bias towards bad environmental news in the scientific community, environmental interest groups, and the media. Drawing valuable lessons about tradeoffs and

A professor of politics at Duquesne University, Charles T. Rubin is the author of The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Environmentalism.

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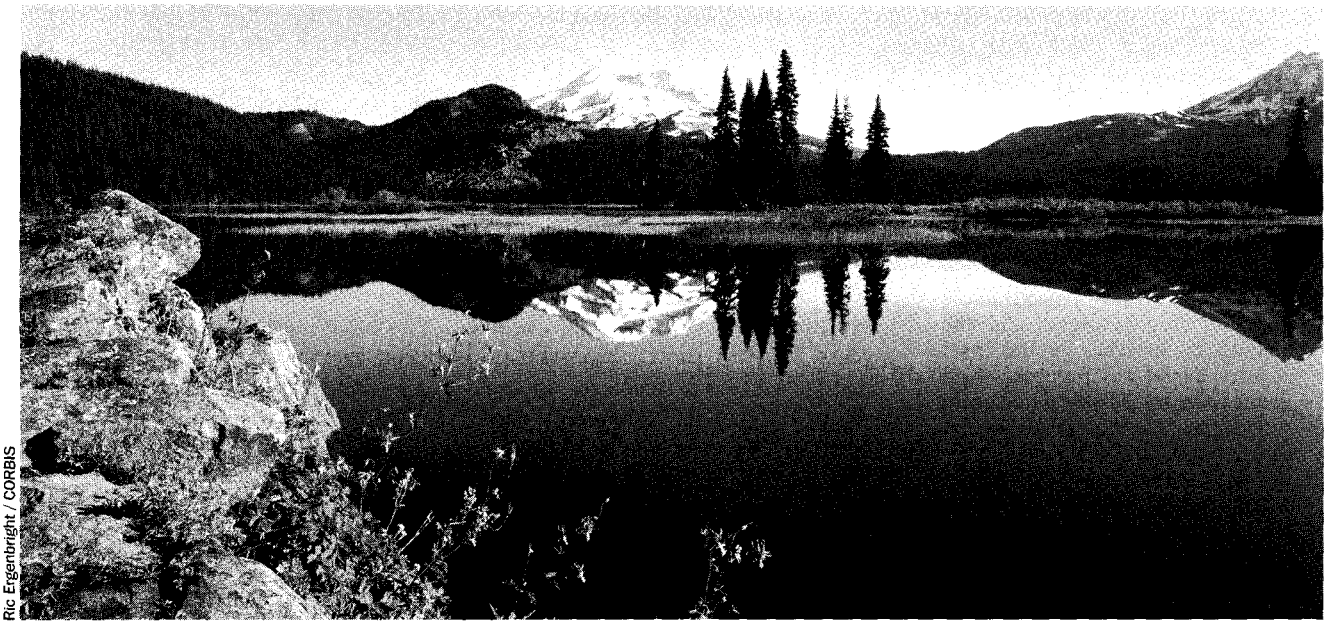

Ric Ergenbright / CORBIS

priorities, he makes clear why environmental goods cannot be treated as uniquely privileged—and he suggests how pernicious it is that over half of America's voters think we cannot do too much to protect the environment. "The expressed dislike of prioritization does not mean that we will not end up prioritizing, only that our choices will be worse."

Lomborg's *The Skeptical Environmentalist* has so many virtues (to say nothing of its 2,930 endnotes), it seems unfair to predict that the book will not succeed at creating the "appreciable change in attitude about environmental problems" its author desires. But think for a moment about the fate of Julian Simon—and the parallel fates of Judd Alexander, William Baarschers, John Baden, Ronald Bailey, Robert Balling Jr., Joe Bast, Ben Bloch, Karen Bolander, Alston Chase, George Claus, Leonard Cole, Edith Efron, Gregg Easterbrook, Alan Fitzsimmons, Bernard Frieden, Michael Fumento, Jay Lehr, Marc Landy, Bernard Lewis, Harold Lyons, William Rathje, Dixy Lee Ray, Marc Roberts, Michael Sanera, Jane Shaw, Fred Singer, Stephen Thomas, Elizabeth Whelan, Aaron Wildavsky, and others.

At various times over the past four decades, each of these writers has produced works that attempt to show the shortcomings of contemporary environmentalism. They have not all been as comprehensive as Lomborg's, but taken as a whole they have covered much the same territory. Other than providing valuable updates, *The Skeptical Environmentalist* breaks little new ground in environmental criticism.

Lomborg's work is no less necessary for being the latest in a string of such works. Still, that leaves the question of environmentalism's extraordinary persistence. Why don't the facts seem to count for much in environmental matters?

The answer needs to go beyond Lomborg's analysis of the Litany. The state of the world as Lomborg sees it depends on a powerful sense of progress—a justified sense, but one that must remain, in all honesty, uncertain. Past results do not guarantee future performance, as advertisements for investment funds always note, and it is always difficult to see clearly the fragile components of the foundations upon which one lives. Environmentalists exploit this uncertainty, promising in its place complete certainty if only we remake the world as they desire. Lomborg believes things will get better, which seems rather likely. Environmentalists believe things can be made the best, which seems extremely unlikely. You'd think the possibility of Lomborg's vision would easily vanquish the impossibility of the environmentalists'—but the magic of claiming "the best" always trumps the dullness of claiming "the better."

Similarly, Lomborg sees present problems as opportunities for human ingenuity as capable of achieving increasing security for increasing numbers of people, while environmentalists turn them into apocalyptic presentiments. Here again, Lomborg has only common sense on his side. The environmentalists have the universal human imagination of the end of the world: If things appear to be going well, they are only going well *so far*, and this or that environmental indicator is a bellwether of future disaster.

As we accumulate experience of disasters not happening, this kind of argument ought to lose its power. But the persistent ability of environmentalists to conjure up the world's end is based on shifting the burden of proof. Somehow, critics of environmentalism have been put in a position of having to prove definitively that something will never happen. This maneuver represents a tremendous rhetorical triumph. When critics are forced—as they must be—to admit that proving a negative is impossible, they seem to concede that there is something gen-

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uine about the environmental fears.

The real issue in dispute, as Lomborg recognizes in his discussion of global climate change, is what we want the future to look like. Lomborg does not develop this insight into the essentially political nature of the environmentalist program as much as he could have. Reasonable people may disagree about whether the environmental vision stems from "secularized" religious belief, from self-interested behavior within liberal democratic institutions, or from a utopian mindset. But there is little question environmentalism is driven primarily by a vision of the way the world ought to be—a vision that puts the environment above liberty, self-government, human diversity, and material well-being.

Science is a weapon in advancing this vision, but its use among devoted environmentalists is purely tactical. In *The Skeptical Environmentalist* Bjørn Lomborg, like his many predecessors, has performed a valuable service in attempting to block the misuse of science for political ends. But until more people understand that the world promised by contemporary environmentalism is not a world in which they would want to live, there will be little change in our arguments about the environment. ♦

Behind Hollywood's Lines

War the way we would like it to be.

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

In past eras of moviemaking, it was possible to combine great entertainment with a moral agenda—matching riveting action with a serious inquiry into contemporary events. But, beginning in the 1960s, Hollywood was transformed, first by counterculture chic and then by political correctness. For years now, big movies have come in just two flavors: You can have relentless action pictures with car crashes, naked ladies, and no character development, or you can have weepy, sloganizing, conspiracy-driven ideological clunkers.

That isn't to say some of these films aren't fabulous entertainment. But serious movie fans have long despaired of seeing a terrific movie about great issues and a heroic response to them. That may all change now, as Hollywood comes to terms with the attack of September 11. But with *Behind Enemy Lines*, director John Moore has already changed the rules for the better—much better.

Stephen Schwartz is completing a new book to be called The Two Faces of Islam.

Behind Enemy Lines may be the most exciting war movie ever made. The pace is nonstop, combining amazing directness in photography with concise, almost Rumsfeldian dialogue emphasizing courage and fortitude. American Navy lieutenant Chris Burnett (played by Owen Wilson), a navigator based on an aircraft carrier, is bored and irritable about flying missions over Bosnia-Herzegovina. It isn't much of a war, at least for Americans; there's nothing at stake, and no goal except flying missions.

So he decides not to reenlist—but his letter stating his desire to leave the Navy offends his commander, Admiral Leslie Reigart (Gene Hackman). You don't have to have served in the Navy to recognize the authentic commitment the admiral feels. Sent over Bosnia once again on Christmas, Burnett is shot down by a Serbian missile. The film covers the effort to retrieve him. The main obstacle is the smarmy attitude of a European naval officer of unstated nationality, but clearly intended to be Spanish, Admiral Juan Piquet (Joaquim de Almeida).

If the story sounds familiar, it should, since it is loosely based on the experiences of Navy lieutenant Scott O'Grady, who was rescued from Bosnia by American forces after a similar shooting down by the Serbs. While the film is neither geographically nor chronologically correct, it is morally accurate. The true story, or stories, here, involve something other than evasion and survival. *Behind Enemy Lines* is really about uncovering the truth of what happened to the Bosnian Muslims and about European moral abdication.

But because the film's main goal is to hold the moviegoer's attention, the message never interferes with its plot and tempo. Director Moore seems to have an Eisenstein-like understanding of the raw impact of warships as symbols of power. Call this picture the *Battleship Potemkin* of American interventionism. One scene, a choreographed set of explosions in a devastated factory, could have been dropped. But the film includes none of the ludicrously improbable feats of strength and martial arts on display in most action thrillers. Owen Wilson has been criticized as callow in the role of Burnett, but the truth is that he captures exactly the mix of boldness and vulnerability we see in American youths sent off to war. Burnett never becomes a comic-book character. Neither do the Serbs. Having covered the collapse of Yugoslavia since 1987, I can attest to the accuracy of their portrayal. And the Bosnian Muslim driving a pickup while listening to 1950s rock 'n' roll is also an exact depiction.

Behind Enemy Lines is a picture that works because the audience knows in advance how it will end: with American honor bright. It shows no Americans chickening out, protecting their bureaucratic positions, lying, or betraying their comrades. This is who we want to be—and it is also the truth about the Balkan Wars. There could be no better time for this movie to appear. If we had any sense, the first thing we'd do is dub this movie into Arabic and Urdu—and run it on a loop from a satellite, beamed to the Middle East, for the next six months. ♦

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Calvin and Hobbes

The revival of Christian philosophy.

BY THOMAS HIBBS

What accounts for the surprising upturn of interest in philosophy of religion in major American departments of philosophy over the last thirty years? Alvin Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* and Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* are illustrative of contemporary philosophy of religion at its best. These are mature books, by philosophers at the pinnacle of their careers, both of whom began the study of philosophy as undergraduates at Calvin College. What do these books tell us about the nature, and the reasons for the success, of Christian philosophy of religion?

Warranted Christian Belief
by Alvin Plantinga
Oxford Universiy Press, 576 pp., $24.95

Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology
by Nicholas Wolterstorff
Cambridge University Press, 627 pp., $54.95

What is most striking about the writings of Plantinga and Wolterstorff is the way they deploy the logical skills and technical virtuosity of trained analytic philosophers to defend an account of philosophy quite alien to secular academia. They offer Christian apologetics without apology.

Alvin Plantinga is so celebrated for his ability to dissect arguments and to invent creative counter-examples that the *Philosophical Lexicon* of Daniel Dennet includes the following entry: "alvinize, v. To stimulate protracted discussion by making a bizarre claim. 'His contention that natural evil is due to Satanic agency alvinized his listeners.'" *Warranted Christian Belief* is both the last book in a trilogy of investigations in contemporary epistemology and a rehearsal of the major arguments that have preoccupied its author throughout his career.

Thomas Hibbs is professor of philosophy at Boston College and author of Virtue's Splendor: Wisdom, Prudence, and the Good Life *(Fordham University Press).*

Like his previous works, *Warrant* shows Plantinga at his best when dismantling purported refutations of Christian belief. Subjected to careful, logical scrutiny, many such objections simply dissolve. In *Warrant*, Plantinga restates his demolition of the so-called problem of evil. The strongest version of this objection holds that the existence of evil is "logically inconsistent" with the existence of the sort of God in whom Christians believe. Yet it is not clear that there is any *logical* inconsistency here; thus, opponents of theism retreat to the weaker claim that the existence of evil offers "powerful evidence against" the existence of God. But this objection hinges upon the question whether God has good reasons to permit evil. Those who argue that he does not are hard pressed to demonstrate precisely how they know this. As Plantinga sees it, this objection typically reduces to some version of the following, feeble line of reasoning: "I see no reason why God should permit such evil, therefore there is no such reason."

Although Plantinga is fond of taking on atheists, he reserves his harshest judgment for the alleged friends of Christianity who cede too much ground to modern secularism. Embarrassed by the intellectually unfashionable details of the Gospels, some philosophers of religion—most notably John Hick, the highly influential philosopher of religion who functions as a sort of pope for those who no longer think Christian doctrines are true but who want to continue to call themselves "Christian"—go so far as to concede that all particular religious claims are "literally false," even if religious belief serves the admirable practical goal of helping individuals to overcome selfishness. As Plantinga sees it, Hick's attempt to avoid the imperialism of claims to truth involves him in an even greater form of self-exaltation, since in Hick's view everyone is wrong except an enlightened few who have had the opportunity to read Hick.

Plantinga is most impatient with liberal scripture scholars, who often base their creative reconstructions of the Gospels on "what we now know" to be scientific or rational. Theologians, some of whom are remarkably ignorant of what is actually going on in philosophy or science, often talk as if there were a clear consensus among philosophers about what's rational or even about how we should determine what's rational. For example, Christians who want to dispense with what they take to be the unseemly stories of miracles in scripture often rely upon the premise that miraculous intrusions into nature have been shown to be scientifically impossible. But science has never demonstrated any such thing.

Plantinga's "defense" of religious faith takes aim at the supposition that believers need to justify their faith before some neutral court of reason. Since his earliest work, Plantinga has adopted the following polemical strategy: Although there may be no universally persuasive argument on behalf of the truth of Christianity or even theism, there is no convincing refutation of it either. The belief in the existence of God stands on the same footing as many of our other beliefs, such as the existence of other minds, about which philosophers have not been able to reach a consensus.

Indeed, Plantinga goes so far as to deny that religious belief is in need of any justification whatsoever. Like perceptual beliefs and memory beliefs, which ordinary folk accept without demanding proof, religious faith is a

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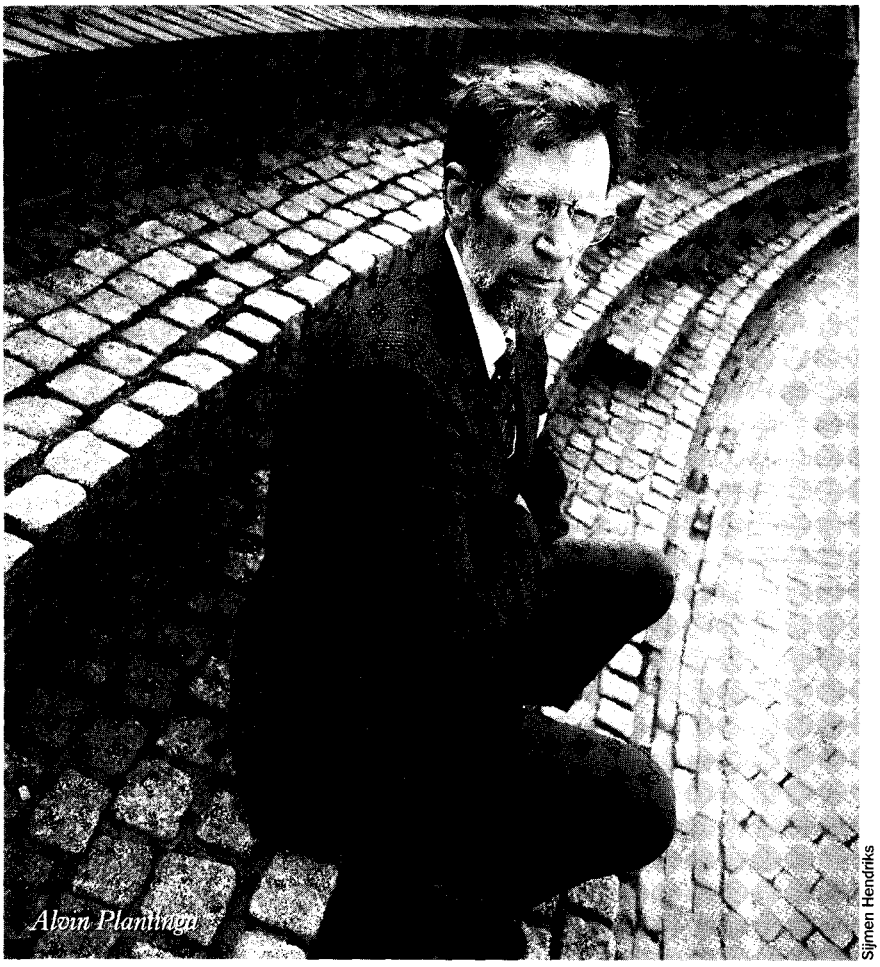
properly basic belief, not a belief that is arrived at on the basis of reasoning or inference. Now, critics see this as courting irrationalism and relativism. Cannot anyone declare any belief to be basic and thus remove it from rational scrutiny? According to Plantinga, basic beliefs are not immune to criticism and refutation. We typically take the reports of our senses and memory as basic and, quite reasonably, don't feel the need to justify them. But this does not mean that these beliefs are beyond revision or even repudiation. We may well encounter good reasons to question or reject them.

What is noteworthy about Plantinga's approach is the way it reverses the tendency in modern philosophy to suspend belief in what ordinary human beings take on trust. And this tilting of the balance away from doubt and back to trust involves a rethinking of the entire tradition of modern philosophy.


Alvin Plantinga

Sijmen Hendriks

The pervasive theme of Wolterstorff's book on Thomas Reid, the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, is precisely trust. One of the great dissenters from the mainstream of modern philosophy, Reid advocates a realism that puts him at odds with Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Berkeley. All of these philosophers are proponents of what Reid calls the "theory of ideas," the claim that the immediate object of the human mind is not a thing in the world but an idea in the mind. Given this starting point, the task for philosophy is to try to establish some sort of connection between the idea in me and the world out there. But all such attempts are futile and end either in Hume's skepticism or Berkeley's even more bizarre conclusion that matter does not exist, that there are only minds and ideas.

Reid traces Berkeley's theory back to its roots, the theory of ideas, and begins to wonder what basis there is for this unproven assumption, shared by all modern philosophers. When he finds none, he retreats to the naive assumption of the vulgar, namely, that we immediately perceive sensible things and that, accompanying that perception, is an immediate and irresistible belief in the existence of what we perceive. Reid observes that all human beings, whether they become philosophers or not, share these convictions. Reversing the trend in modern philosophy to hold all deliverances of common sense in abeyance until they have been vindicated by proof, Reid argues that, in any contest between philosophy and common sense, the burden of proof is on philosophy. Of course, philosophy transcends common sense in its descriptive and explanatory tasks; it may even reach conclusions that contravene pre-philosophical beliefs. But it should do so only when driven by clear, unassailable arguments. The proponents of the theory of ideas have no such arguments.

Wolterstorff is careful to note that Reid does envision a positive, reflective role for philosophy. Yet the philosopher needs to beware, lest his aspiration for certitude and unity lead him to flout the sheer variety of kinds of evidence that contribute to human knowledge. There is indeed the evidence of immediate consciousness, on which the philosophers have concentrated. But there is also the evidence of sense, of memory, and of testimony. Wolterstorff underscores Reid's prudent sense of the limitations to philosophical knowledge. The philosopher can note and describe the diverse criteria appropriate to the healthy functioning of our faculties. What he cannot do is reduce all the faculties to one formula.

The accent in Reid is on trust rather than doubt, and thus he stands athwart the dominant strain of modern philosophy. There's a telling passage in Descartes where he laments our ever having been children, under the tutelage of others and without the full use of the critical powers of reason. His method of radical, universal doubt is designed precisely to free us from such dependence on custom and authority,

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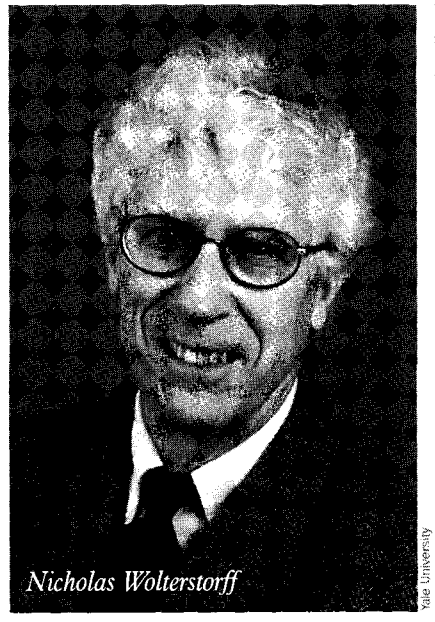
to free us from ever having been children. By contrast, Reid sees trust and testimony as constitutive of our nature and our intellectual activities. "It is the intention of nature, that we should be carried in arms before we are able to walk upon our legs; and . . . likewise that our belief should be guided by the authority and reason of others, before it can be guided by our own reason." Although we are not for long in this condition of utter dependence, "Reason, even in her maturity, borrows aid from testimony. . . . For as we find good reason to reject testimony in some cases, so in others we find good reason to rely upon it with perfect security." Faculties are "innocent until proven guilty," and when doubts arise, as they inevitably do, they arise against a background of accepted knowledge and with respect to very particular questions. If doubt were to become global, there would be no remedy, at least no philosophical remedy.

In his preface, Wolterstorff acknowledges that what initially attracted him to Reid was Reid's antirationalism, the "fundamental role in his thought of ungrounded trust." Now, it is perhaps a bit misleading to call Reid an "antirationalist" since Reid thinks it perfectly "reasonable" for us to take many things on trust. Nonetheless, Wolterstorff's description highlights the affinities of Reid with certain elements of postmodernism and at least partially accounts for his recent upsurge in popularity. Although Plantinga often rails against postmodernism as a sort of intellectual pathology, further evidence of the link between postmodernist themes and contemporary philosophy of religion can be had in his *Advice for Christian Philosophers* (1984), the work that has become a sort of Declaration of Independence for the now thriving Society of Christian Philosophers.

Throughout this essay, Plantinga recurs to a postmodern motif, the link between intellectual practices and participation in certain kinds of communities. He notes that "philosophy is a social enterprise" whose "standards and assumptions—the parameters within which we practice our craft—are set by our mentors and the great contemporary centers of philosophy." For the believer, this can be liberating. Although believing philosophers cannot "retreat into isolated enclaves," they should not suppose that their philosophical agenda is identical to that of unbelievers. Much less should they set out to justify beliefs on the basis of "premises accepted by all parties," an impossible task.

At Plantinga's hands, postmodernism, so often hostile to religion, paves the way for a very bold reconception of Christian philosophy. Of course,


Nicholas Wolterstorff

Yale University

it is one thing to note the link between what philosophers believe, even what they take to be live questions, and where and by whom they were educated. It is quite another to conclude that knowledge is utterly circumscribed within particular communities. Reid's emphasis on trust as appropriate to and necessary for *human nature* strikes not so much a postmodern, as a premodern, note, echoing Aristotle, Aquinas, and many others. Wolterstorff's alternative narrative of modern philosophy, defending Reid's great dissent from the modern epistemological project, leaves open the question of the relationship of Reid's project and that of contemporary Christian philosophers such as Plantinga to that of a host of premodern Christian philosophers.

Why does this matter? First, Plantinga's conception of Christian philosophy is rather loose: Christians doing philosophy without hiding their convictions, putting them up front, reasoning from and not just to the beliefs they espouse as Christians. An immediate question arises concerning the scope and subject matter of philosophy of religion, especially how it might be distinguished from theology. Some premodern Christian philosophers, notably St. Thomas Aquinas, identified as belonging properly to the discipline of theology many of the topics—such as sin, redemption, and the Trinity—investigated by the contemporary philosophers of religion.

Second, one might wonder whether contemporary philosophy of religion is nearly as independent of current philosophical categories as it should be. Among contemporary Christian philosophers there is sometimes a breezy dismissal of the history of philosophy. (Wolterstorff's work is a hopeful and instructive exception here.) How much allegiance does a contemporary Christian philosopher owe to the long tradition of philosophical and theological thinking in the Christian community?

Here we reach the problem of whether there can be one Christian philosophy or whether the nature and understanding of Christian philosophy will vary from one denomination to another. The Catholic emphasis on tradition, for example, has, in philosophy, resulted in detailed study of the history of philosophy. Catholics have also typically insisted on a rich metaphysical foundation as the indispensable source of an authentic Christian philosophy, a point recently reiterated by John Paul II in his encyclical *Faith and Reason*.

Whatever might be the merits of these reservations, they should not detract from what is a stunning and improbable success story. Plantinga and Wolterstorff deserve credit for helping to reverse a trend that, by the middle of the last century, had nearly succeeded in eliminating the scourge of religion from serious philosophical discourse. ♦

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Books in Brief

***Holidays on Ice* by David Sedaris (Little, Brown, 123 pp., $14.95).** Here are some instructions for reading *Holidays on Ice*: Rip out pages 45 through 123 and use them as coasters while you read the remaining essay. Actually, the other five pieces in David Sedaris's collection are mildly amusing; the best of them is "Dinah, the Christmas Whore," an apparently true memoir of his sister's most successful holiday idea: bringing home a prostitute to be interviewed by the weird Sedaris family.

But "SantaLand Diaries," a memoir of working as an elf to Santa in Macy's department store, is what's kept *Holidays on Ice* in print since 1997. It's the funniest Christmas writing ever done: "The woman in charge of costuming assigned us our outfits and gave us a lecture on keeping things clean. . . . 'And don't tell me, "I don't wear underpants, I'm a dancer." You're not a dancer. If you were a real dancer you wouldn't be here. You're an elf and you're going to wear panties like an elf.'"

Sedaris describes office politics among costumed midgets, elf hierarchy in the competitive extraction of coins from wishing wells, and the assembly-line similarity of adults' witticisms to Santa. "SantaLand Diaries" deals in closely observed incidents, simply related—not sentimental reflections, obvious mockeries, or creaky profundities. "The afflicted came to visit Santa," Sedaris observes, and Santa "made it a point to grab each child's hand and ask what they wanted for Christmas. He did this until he came to a child who had no hands. This made him self-conscious, so he started placing a hand on the child's knee until he came to a child with no legs. After that he decided to simply nod his head and chuckle." Real wit is rare, especially about Christmas. Here it is.

—Michael Long

***A Visit to Vanity Fair: Moral Essays on the Present Age*, by Alan Jacobs (Brazos, 173 pp., $18.99).** Asked once for an author's description to go with an essay he'd written, Alan Jacobs suggested: "Jacobs is an associate professor of English at Wheaton College, and isn't it a scandal he's not a full professor yet?" Well, he's a full professor now, and the scandal is that he's not yet known as one of America's best essayists. He's got the whole package of skills: quick comedy, high seriousness, wide learning, and an easy, rapid prose. He's also got religion, which may explain why he isn't better known, for mainstream American publishing grants little room to old-fashioned Christian sensibility.

That's a shame, for the essays collected in *A Visit to Vanity Fair* show just what Jacobs can do with that sensibility. His topics range from C.S. Lewis to Bob Dylan to the evangelical practice of seeking advice by letting the Bible fall open at random verses. Worth particular notice are "Blinded by the Light," Jacobs's cover story for THE WEEKLY STANDARD about the spirituality books that dominate the bestseller list, and "A Bible Fit for Children," a simultaneously comic and profound account of children's Bibles that is one of the best essays anyone's produced in the last decade. A first-rate collection.

—Richard Datchery

***Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America's University*, by Morton Keller and Phyllis Keller (Oxford University Press, 640 pp., $35).** This is a fascinating and engaging account of the rise of Harvard since 1933. Unfortunately, it doesn't address the most important perplexities posed by the idea of a "modern university." While Morton and Phyllis Keller have much to say about, for example, Harvard's astonishing financial success, they have little to say about the quality of education that one receives today at the school. Problems such as grade inflation and political correctness receive fewer than a handful of pages. Most important, *Making Harvard Modern* does not raise in a serious manner the question of the true educational purpose of a university. Of course, the question of the purpose of our universities isn't much raised by anyone these days—even at Harvard.

—Steve Lenzner

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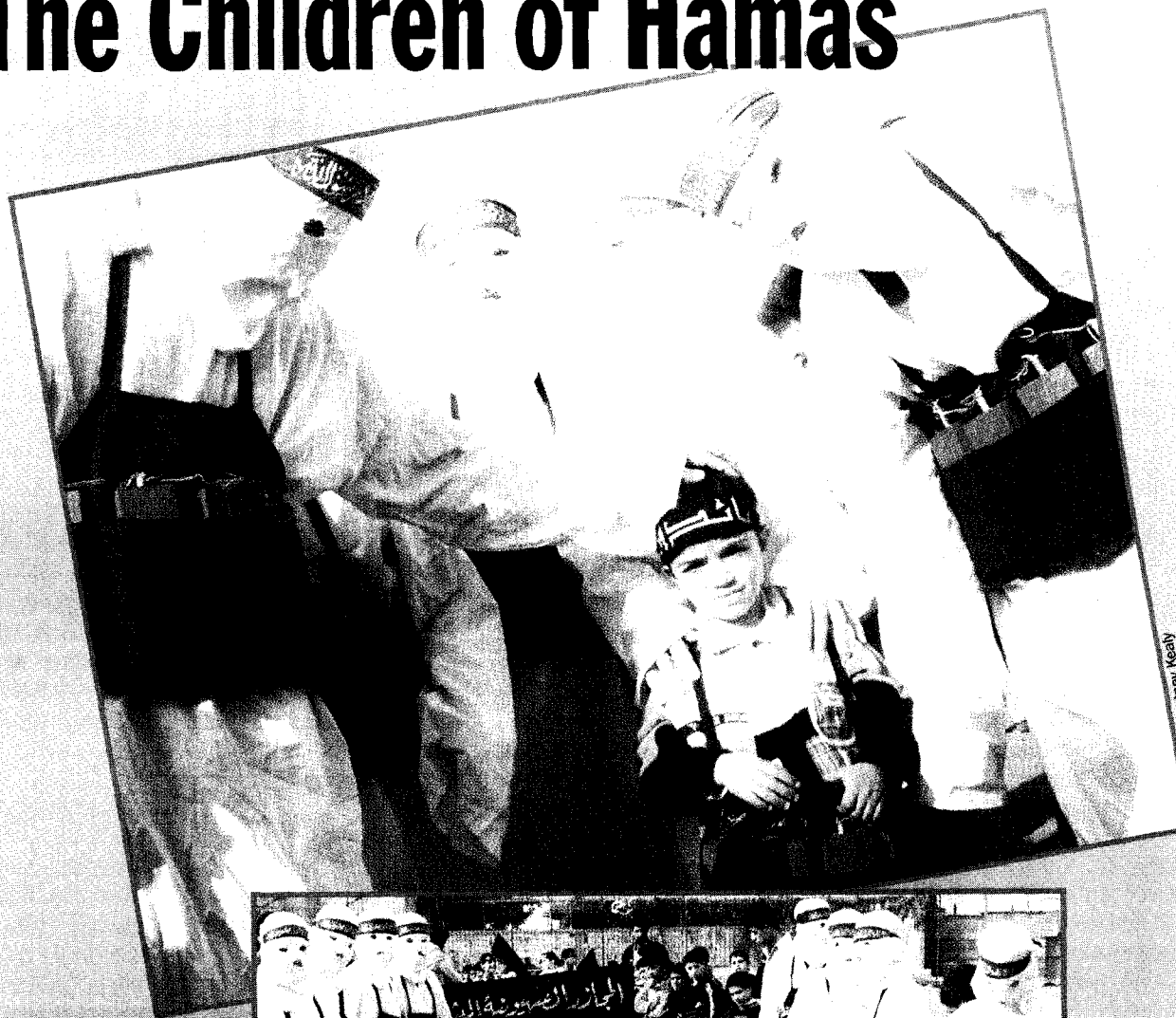
The Children of Hamas



Getty Images / Courtney Kealy

AFP / Mahmoud Zayat

To mark their group's 14th anniversary, Hamas terrorists dress up a small child as a suicide bomber (top); other children participate in a parade (below). The celebration of the Palestinian terror organization was held Dec. 9 in the Ain El Helweh refugee camp in Lebanon.

the weekly Standard
December 24, 2001

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The High School Diploma Drought

Chester E. Finn Jr. is a distinguished visiting fellow, Hoover Institution; member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education; and president, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

If you're a young American, graduating from high school makes an enormous difference in everything that follows. If you have that diploma, you can go to college, employers will look twice at you, and your lifetime earnings will be a lot higher than those of your age mates who lack that credential.

Yet the high school graduation rate has not been getting the attention it warrants. With the federal government reporting a completion rate of 86 percent, many people believe that today just about everyone in the United States makes it through high school except a smallish number of hapless "dropouts." Hence most educators and policymakers have shifted their attention to the high school–college transition and to college completion rates.

That shift is premature, according to a sobering new study of high school graduation rates by scholar Jay P. Greene, conducted on behalf of the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

Greene recalculates these rates using a simple but plausible method that discounts "equivalency certificates" (the so-called GED) and adjusts for distortions in the federal data. His conclusion: Only 74 percent of those who should have graduated from high school in 1998 actually did so.

Yet that's the good news. The chilling news is that just 56 percent of blacks and 54 percent of Latino youngsters received diplomas "on schedule" in 1998. This suggests an educational crisis among minority youths that's worse than most of us had realized. Although some of these boys and girls will end up with belated diplomas or GEDs, Greene's data show that nearly half of them are entering adulthood behind the educational eight ball.

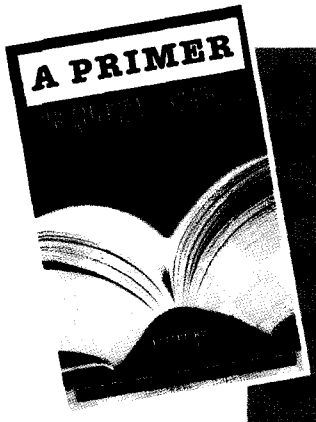
High school completion rates also turn out to vary hugely by state and community. Ninety-three percent of Iowa's young people graduated in 1998, but only 57 percent of Georgia's did. Graduation rates among large school districts range from 82 to 87 percent in Albuquerque, Boston, and the Washington suburbs down to 47 percent in Chicago, 43 percent in Milwaukee, and a numbing 28 percent in Cleveland.

Although state and municipal differences are influenced by student demographics, Greene found that there's more to this story. For example, 85 percent of Boston's African American students graduate, but only 34 percent of black students in Louisville accomplish this. In El Paso two-thirds of Latinos graduate, but in Dallas less than two-fifths do so. Other factors are plainly at work besides race and ethnicity, factors having to do with the schools themselves.

Whereas graduation rates alone are not a satisfactory gauge of educational performance—it's possible to pump them up by making it easier to graduate—they're a telling clue as to whether an education system is succeeding. **If just three-quarters of young Americans—and barely half of black and Latino students—are managing to graduate from high school on time, we've got a whopping problem.** This one probably can't be solved by ratcheting up academic standards and or requiring more tests. Even at today's low levels, these methods are not yielding success for millions of young Americans.

— Chester E. Finn Jr.

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



Want to learn more about K–12 education policy?

Visit us on-line at* www.hoover.org *or contact us to receive a complimentary copy of* A Primer on America's Schools*—11 chapters by Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.

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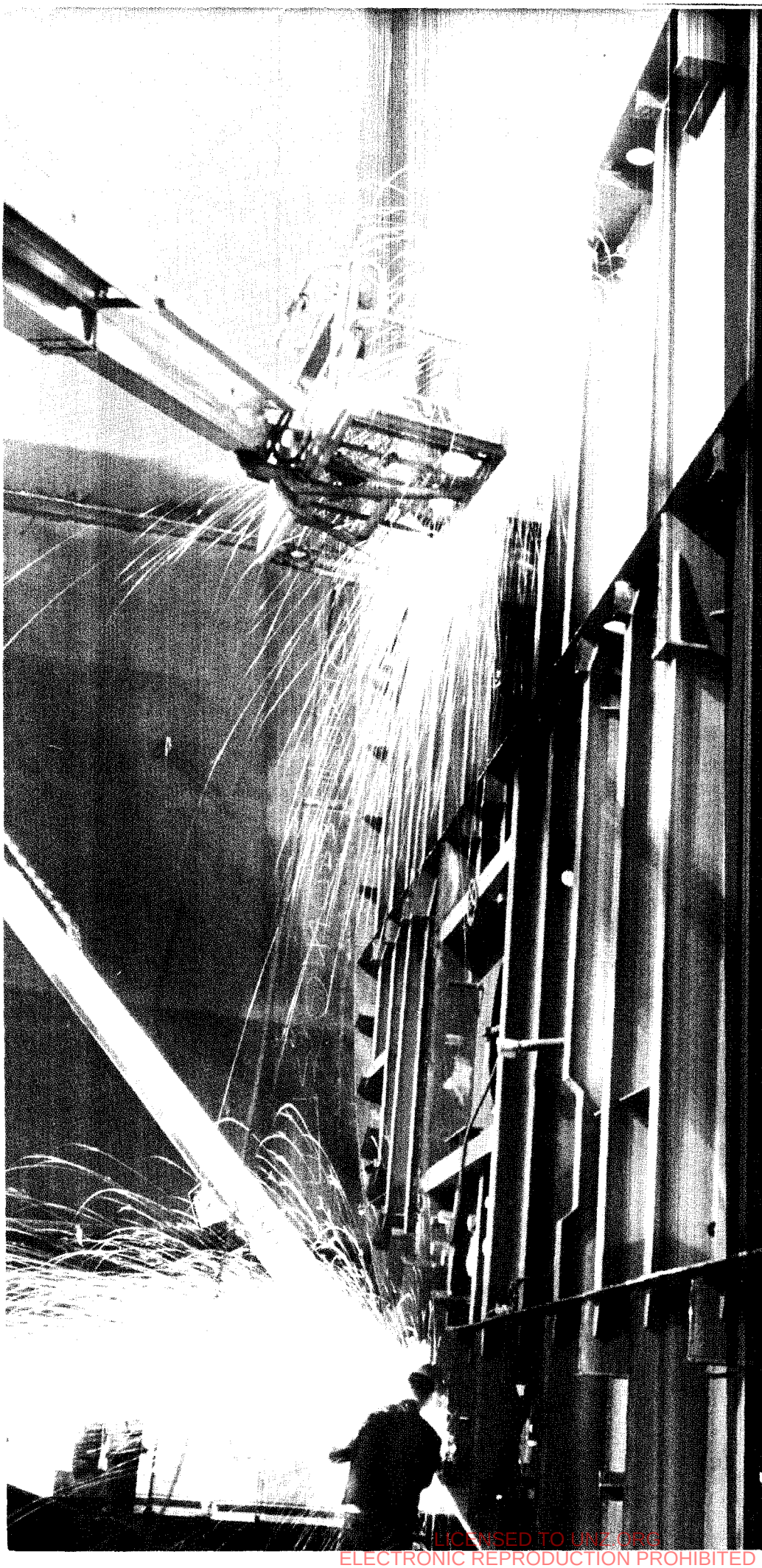

A Government Handout at the Expense of an Entire Industry

A few Big Steel companies are asking Congress for a very expensive gift: A taxpayer funded bailout.

They claim they need the money for retirement benefits. But instead, the money will go to relieve Big Steel's financial obligations. It's corporate welfare at its worst — *a government* handout at taxpayers' expense that punishes responsible steel companies.

America's 21st century steel companies oppose the bailout. It's a "quick-fix" for a favored few that doesn't solve the real problem threatening every American steel company — unfair foreign trade practices — foreign countries that dump their subsidized steel in America.

Stop the bailout for a favored few. Urge Washington to level the playing field for all American steel companies with strong section 201 trade relief.

American steel should stand strong against special interests and unfair foreign trade.

NUCOR

Keep America Strong as Steel

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